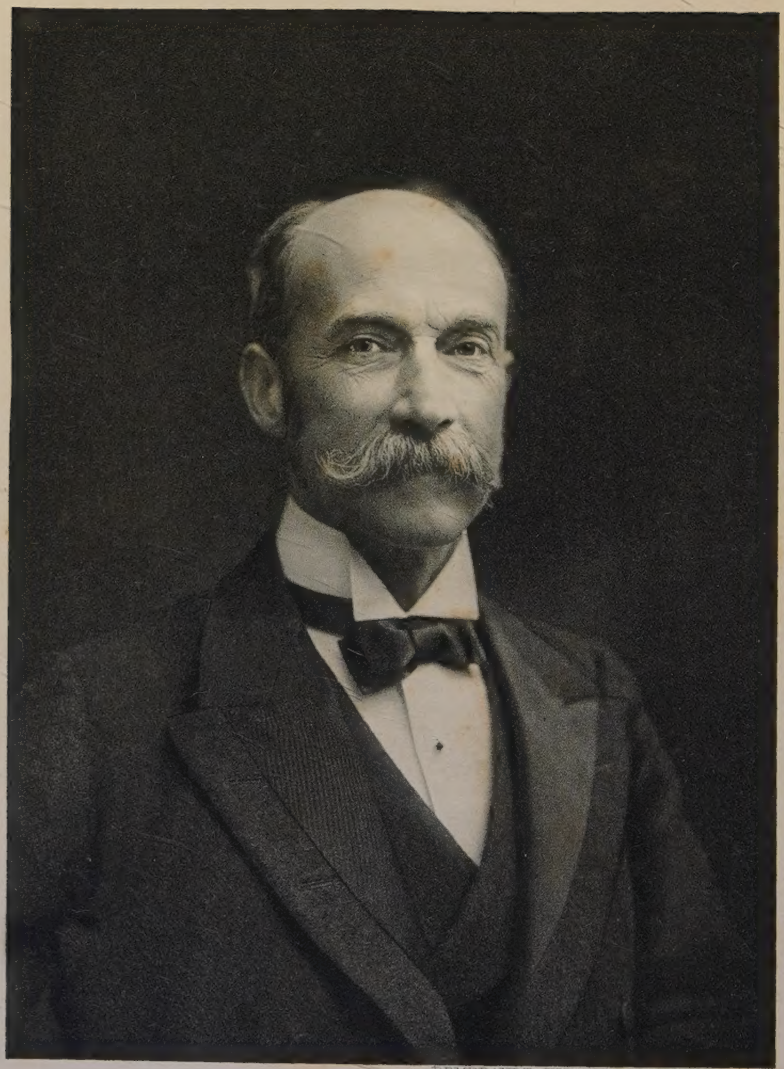
The Times History

of

The War in South Africa



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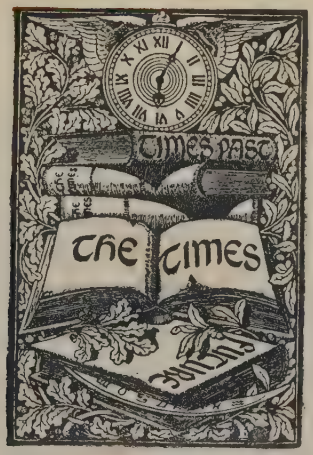
The Times History

of

The War in South Africa

1899–1902



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Vol. II.

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PREFACE

In the preceding volume the political causes of the South African War were traced from the British acquisition of Cape Colony down to the ultimatum presented to the British Government by the Transvaal on October 9, 1899. The military antecedents of that war, and the narrative of the first three months of fighting, from the expiration of the ultimatum down to the battle of Colenso, form the contents of the present volume.

By the military antecedents I have understood, not merely an account of the preparations made for war on both sides before the final brusque rejection of the British attempts to secure, by a peaceful compromise, some satisfactory settlement of the long-standing grievances of the Uitlander population in the Transvaal, but also some description, however brief, of the historical development, organisation, and chief characteristics of the two widely different military systems which the break down of the political situation suddenly left face to face. That description may, I hope, help the reader not only to follow with a clearer appreciation the actual narrative of the fighting in this and subsequent volumes, but to see underlying the story the real and deeper causes of success or failure, to trace the influence of national characteristics and national organisation for war in the seemingly fortuitous sequence of events, and in the often almost incomprehensible actions of generals and politicians.

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It is in the realisation of those more deeply rooted causes of our past failures, quite as much as in the indiscriminate adoption of methods found useful on the South African veld, that lie the best hopes of the reforms required to insure the safety and the full development of that which is already in part a great living reality, but in part still remains a precious ideal—the British Empire.

The remaining chapters of the volume are concerned with the first three months' operations of the war, beginning with the failure of the force considered sufficient to defend the South African colonies from invasion, and ending with the failure of the great expeditionary army that was to achieve the conquest of the Boer republics. In these nine chapters only the main threads of the military narrative are dealt with. The earlier portions of the sieges of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking, of General French's operations round Colesberg, and Colonel Plumer's movements in Rhodesia, have only been touched on, to be recounted more fully in later chapters. In the same way some of the most important aspects of the campaign—the mobilisation of the troops, their transport by sea, the railway and wagon transport arrangements at the seat of war, the provision of remounts, supplies, and ordnance, the equipment of the medical services, and many similar matters the discussion of which in the midst of the fighting narrative would be both tedious and perforce inadequate—have all been left over to be dealt with separately and comprehensively in the concluding volume of the present work. It may be thought that so short a period as three months hardly deserves so long a description, and that at this rate *The Times* History seems to bid fair to emulate, in bulk at least, official histories like those of the Franco-Prussian War or of the Civil War in America. But the fact is that the first months of this war have not

only a more intense dramatic interest than the years that followed, but a greater military significance, both in themselves, because of the clearer contrast they afford between Boer and British methods of fighting—in neither case as yet modified by the experiences of long campaigning—and in their effects upon the subsequent course of the war. Again, it is impossible to determine exactly the length of description to be accorded to a battle on any fixed scale of importance. It is perhaps better, therefore, to select a few at the beginning to describe at length as types of similar engagements to follow: there will be no need then to treat every "unfortunate incident" with the minuteness of detail here devoted to Nicholson's Nek.

There has been little attempt in this volume to rival the picturesque imaginativeness of style of Dr. Conan Doyle, or the vivid and convincing impressionism of "Linesman." It will be enough for me if the simple endeavour to present the reader with a clear story of what actually happened, and why and how it happened, succeeds in attracting his curiosity and holding his attention to the end of the book. The tone adopted has been frankly critical throughout. It may perhaps seem to some that the criticism tends to err on the side of severity, possibly even of captiousness. That certainly has not been my intention. It is true that in the criticism of particular operations I have confined myself principally to the discussion of the proximate causes. It would be wearisome on each occasion to rehearse at length the difficulties which British generals had to face owing to the character of the country, the absence of information, the mobility of the Boers, the lack of initiative of their subordinates, or their own defective training. But no one who has read the chapters dealing with the military antecedents of the war will fail to bear in mind the difficulties under which those

generals laboured, or to make allowance for them. Nor is the object of these criticisms to blame or praise this general or that, or to presume to pass arm-chair judgments upon men who did their best in the perplexing moment of action, but to try and help towards the solution of our present and future needs by the study of our past mistakes. And that object can only be attained by the frankest discussion of those mistakes. If, in my desire to tell the truth without palliation or concealment, I have anywhere overstepped the bounds of fair criticism, I must frankly ask for forgiveness. But I trust that the reader will attribute my fault in such cases to error of judgment or lack of information, and not to any partiality or prejudice. There is one case especially, that of the battle of Colenso and its sequels, where I may possibly be accused of being prejudiced against Sir R. Buller. I can only say that I am conscious of no such prejudice, and could wish that I might have written otherwise.

The task of attempting to treat even so short a period with any attempt at accuracy has not been an easy one. If it was difficult formerly to get a true account of a battle, it has become even more so now with the enormous extension of the firing-line, with smokeless powder, lying down tactics, and khaki uniforms. The general often neither sees the enemy nor even his own firing-line; the firing-line have little to tell but that they were under a rain of bullets, more or less heavy, from this or that direction. A battle is thus more than ever an elaborate puzzle to which a number of persons can give partial answers of varying degrees of correctness or incorrectness. Under no circumstances, perhaps, is the personal equation of error in evidence so great as in the crisis of a battle, and the historian is compelled to treat the private soldier's letter and the general's despatch with equal suspicion. It is only after the most careful and most sceptical

analysis of the available evidence that something resembling the true objective event can be reconstructed. It is this laborious task of reconstruction that I must fain plead as justification for the very considerable delay between the appearance of the first and second volumes, a delay that I fear has proved disappointing to many subscribers.

Even so it would have been impossible to have done nearly as much in the time but for the great measure of help which I have received. My thanks are due first of all to the Army collectively. To all its members, from its official heads down to the privates in the ranks, I owe a great debt of gratitude for the kindness and willingness to help which they have invariably shown me. In writing of a war still, unfortunately, continuing, and on questions of so highly contentious a character as many which the incidents of that war have provoked, it would hardly be advisable to give the names of those who have sent me their diaries, written for me accounts of the events with which they have been connected, corrected proofs or answered the innumerable questions with which I have persecuted them. It is thus alike impossible for me to fortify the statements contained in this narrative by the authority of my informants, or to express my gratitude to them otherwise than anonymously and collectively. Equally anonymous must be my acknowledgment of thanks to those friends of mine who have taken part in the war as burghers of the Boer Republics, by whose help I have been enabled to give some account, however inadequate, of that little known side of the operations. I trust that they will be satisfied that I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to let no tinge of political or patriotic prejudice colour my narrative or distort my facts. The same restriction of anonymity does not apply to those members of *The Times* staff of war correspondents who have assisted me in the work, and who have taken so large a share in it that they may well

claim to be considered co-authors of it. Among these my thanks are due first and foremost to Mr. Lionel James, who has not only written the greater part of the narrative of the early operations in Natal (Chapters IV., V., VI.), but who, through his almost unrivalled knowledge of the British Army, and more especially of the army in South Africa, has proved invaluable to me in the task of collecting, sifting, and working up information both in South Africa and at home. To Mr. Perceval Landon I am indebted for the greater part of the description of Lord Methuen's operations (Chapters IX. and XI.), to Mr. Bron Herbert for the narrative part of the chapter on Colenso, and to Major A. W. A. Pollock for the groundwork of the chapter on Stormberg. I should, however, make it clear that in every case the responsibility for the statements contained in these chapters, and more especially for the criticisms expressed, rests entirely with myself. The errors of fact and judgment—many I fear—contained in this work are mine. Lastly I have to thank the Intelligence Division of the War Office for the use of maps and battle-plans, some of which have been reproduced or adapted in the present volume.

L. S. AMERY.

London, *April* 11, 1902.

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The Times History

OF

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER I *

THE BRITISH MILITARY SYSTEM

THE importance of the political issues involved in the great struggle for supremacy in South Africa, the magnitude of the military operations, and the stubbornness of the contest, have already been dwelt upon in the opening pages of the preceding volume. But, beyond and above its importance as an event in British history, the South African War has a military interest which makes it in some respects one of the most noteworthy wars of modern times. It has not been marked, it is true, by any such triumphs of military organisation, of forethought, or of strategy as those which distinguished the great Prussian campaigns of 1866 and 1870. On the contrary, improvisation, afterthought, and strategical blundering have, to a great extent, characterised the conduct of the war on both sides, and it has been almost as much by negative as by positive examples that the South African War has confirmed the great military lessons which the Prussian General Staff brought home to an astonished world a generation ago. For ourselves, no doubt, the war,

Military interest of South African War.

* The following chapter was written before the publication of the report of Mr. Clinton Dawkins's committee on War Office Organisation. As the criticisms contained in it, however, coincide in the main with those of the report I have not thought it worth while to make any alterations in the text, but have appended one or two quotations from the report in the shape of footnotes.

as the greatest we have fought in modern times, has furnished many valuable lessons in every department of military organisation. But for the world at large the lessons of the South African War are to be sought not so much in the staff offices of Pall Mall or Pretoria, nor yet in the tents of the generals, successful or unsuccessful, on either side, as in the actual forefront of the battle—in the narrow shelter trench, or behind the ant-heap; with the handful of burghers from their sure cover keeping a whole division at bay, or with the soldiers in the open dropping one by one before the deadly hail of bullets sped by an unseen enemy. In other words, the military interest of this war has been primarily tactical rather than strategical or administrative, and it is chiefly in so far as both strategy and organisation are dependent upon tactics that they will be affected by recent events. It has been the first war of any importance fought under the entirely novel tactical conditions introduced by the latest improvements in modern firearms. And, what is more, it has brought to the test of those novel conditions two absolutely different tactical systems. It is this bringing together, under modern conditions and on ground particularly favourable to the unfettered development of modern weapons, of the old-established European military system as represented by the British Army, and of a system so absolutely free from all European traditions and yet so fully developed and logically followed out as was that of the Boers, that makes the South African War, in some respects, even more valuable and stimulating to the military student than a great war like the Franco-German, where superiority in numbers, generalship and organisation, decided between combatants whose methods of fighting were otherwise essentially the same. It is no mere comparison of details, but a reconsideration of the fundamental postulates of the military art that is suggested by our South African experience. To understand the war, it is necessary not only to follow closely the actual engagements in the field, but to have a clear idea of the two different systems there brought together. To avoid continual explanations in the midst of the actual narrative, it is desirable to give some short description both

of the British and Boer military systems, of their historical development, and of their condition at the outbreak of war.

Absence of a distinctively British military system since the days of archery.

It has been said that the English are a warlike but not a military nation, and English history, taken as a whole, confirms that remark. It is true that there is one great period of England's history in which she possessed a truly national military system. The long struggle to subdue the Welsh—a struggle, in some of its features, not altogether unlike the struggle to subdue the Boers—had suggested to the master mind of Edward I. the value of a new tactical system in which the use of the bow should play a leading part. A generation after Edward's death the new system was complete, and for nearly a century England enjoyed a military pre-eminence among the European nations such as no other nation has enjoyed since. The secret of her success may be summed up in the one word—quality. The English archers who routed the vastly superior numbers of the French levies at Cressy, Poitiers, and Agincourt were the picked men of a nation devoted to archery. They were attracted to foreign service by a very high rate of pay, and were trained in a field drill which, if simple, was very practical. The English armies were small, but, in the eyes of the great English captains of those days, skill went for everything and numbers for nothing. But the Wars of the Roses destroyed England's effectiveness as a military power, and the introduction of firearms put an end to the supremacy of six foot bow and cloth-yard shaft, and grey goose feather. Since then England has fought many a war by land and sea. She has become the greatest sea power the world has yet known. Her army has covered itself with glory on many a stubbornly-contested field. But she has never had a truly national military system suited to the temperament and political preferences of her people, still less an Imperial military organisation adapted to the needs of the great empire which has grown round her in the last century. The Regular Army was long mistrusted as a possible engine of despotism, and even after that mistrust had passed away it remained a close corporation wedded to the traditions of its own past, and sundered from the main stream of the national life. So

little was it a national institution that it was, as a matter of habit, largely recruited abroad, and even so recently as the Crimean War the Government had recourse to the expedient of raising a foreign legion. The auxiliary forces, except during the critical period of the Napoleonic wars, were never treated seriously, and their training was but a pallid reflection of that of the regulars.

Reform movement since the Crimea.

It must be admitted that the above statements are truer of the last two centuries, taken as a whole, than of the immediate past. Ever since the Crimean War there has been a movement for military reform, almost imperceptible at times, but growing stronger as it went on, which, though it had not by the end of the century created a national military system or devised an organisation adequate to the needs of the Empire, had at any rate succeeded in bringing the Army in many respects up to the level of efficiency of the ordinary European armies, and in improving its organisation so far as to enable it to meet, though not without much straining of its parts and filling of gaps by improvisation, the demands made upon it by the South African War.

Pre-Cardwellian reforms.

The Crimean War had revealed a picture of utter unpreparedness, of hopeless confusion and disorganisation, over which even the glamour of the brave deeds of British soldiers in the field could not cast a veil. One of the chief roots of the evil lay in the ridiculous dispersion of authority, under which the administration of the Army was entrusted to a dozen different and independent State departments, and the first reforms were largely in the direction of sweeping away useless institutions and unifying control. The office of the Secretary of State at War had already been abolished early in 1855, while the war was still going on, and his functions merged in those of the Secretary of State for War—an office which itself had only been separated from the Colonial Office shortly before the war. Soon afterwards the commissariat, which had been under the Treasury, the artillery, engineers, and fortifications, which had been under a Board of Ordnance, ruled by a Master-General of Ordnance, and sundry minor departments, dealing with clothing, victualling, and medical equipment, were severed

from their original connexions, or deprived of their independence, and absorbed in the War Office. The Commander-in-Chief still continued to enjoy an independent existence at the Horse Guards till 1870. Since then the supremacy of the Secretary of State has been, in theory at least, undisputed, though the internal organisation and correlation of the various offices and departments under his control have been the subject of much discussion, of many inquiries, and of frequent experimental changes, and cannot yet be regarded as satisfactorily settled.* Meanwhile, the task which the British Army had to fulfil was enormously increased by the military reorganisation of India, which followed upon the suppression of the Mutiny. It was decided to raise very considerably the proportion of European to native troops, and at the same time to do away altogether with a local European army, such as had existed under the rule of the Company. The British Army was thus called upon to maintain in India a garrison whose strength has never sunk below 55,000 men, and for many years has been over 70,000.† It is true that India defrays the expenses of this force, but the duty of keeping up the constant stream of reliefs in a state of high efficiency has laid a heavy burden on the British military administration. Almost contemporaneous with this great assumption of Imperial responsibility was the vigorous movement for local defence, in which the present large Volunteer force had its origin. To the year 1859 belong both the formation of the Volunteers and the creation of the National Rifle Association. There is one other important element of the British military organisation which has not yet been referred to—namely, the Militia. This force, the real home army of the United Kingdom, had in the past been raised compulsorily by ballot, but though the Militia Ballot survives

* "The general structure of the War Office organisation has been built up piecemeal as the result of constant changes and compromises. Principles of administration and of business have been too frequently subordinated to temporary exigencies or to personal and political considerations."—*Report of* 1901 *Committee*, p. 2.

† The number fixed by General Peel's Commission was 80,000, but in spite of the growth of the Indian Empire and the gradual advance of Russia that figure has never been reached.

in theory even up to the present day, the Militia reorganisation of 1852 made it, to all intents and purposes, a paid voluntary force trained for a short period each year.

Defective state of Army 1860–1870.

The British Army in the sixties was thus composed of three different forces, viz., the Regular Army, some 180,000 strong (including the establishment in India); the Militia, mustering some 110,000–120,000 men; and the Volunteers and Yeomanry, fluctuating between 150,000 and 200,000. Though in a sense under one control these forces had absolutely no organic connexion with each other. Only one of them, the Regular Army, could lay any claim to efficiency. The quality of the men was on the whole good and the *esprit de corps* of the regiments very high. But the training of both officers and men was antiquated. The "purchase" system, by which the officers virtually held the Army in pledge, was a serious bar to all internal reform. The low pay, the irksome restraints of the soldier's life, the harsh punishments inflicted for trivial offences, the long period for which the intending soldier had to pledge himself, were serious deterrents to intending recruits, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep the Army up to its establishment. Such as it was, the Army was an absolutely inelastic quantity, and contained no provision for expansion in cases of emergency. Small as the force was compared with the armies of European nations, it was extremely expensive. Not only was the whole of it always with the colours, but the long-service system brought with it a heavy burden in the shape of pensions. The need for radical reform was obvious, but the direction in which it was to be made was yet uncertain.

Prussia and the short-service system.

The same decade which saw the British Army groping vaguely for reform saw the triumph of the Prussian military system on the Continent. Prussia began the decade with an ambitious policy and a very narrow exchequer. To satisfy the demands of the one and keep within the limits of the other, she required a system which, while only calling for a small and cheap standing army in time of peace, should provide a large force for war at a moment's notice. These conditions were fulfilled by the

compulsory national short-service system originally devised by Prussian patriotism to outwit the restrictions upon the numbers of the Prussian army imposed by Napoleon after Jena, and now perfected by Moltke and Roon to meet the requirements of Prussian policy. The essence of the system lay in making the so-called Reserves part of the actual first line of battle, in the instantaneous "mobilisation" of the whole trained male population. Its creators knew that they ran the risk of lowering the quality of their trained fighting material by the reduction in the period of service, but they trusted to a careful use of the soldier's three years, to a high training of the *cadres* of officers, and, above all, to sound organisation and to the development of the general staff—the central "brain of the army"—to compensate and more than compensate for possible deficiencies. The experience of 1864, 1866, and 1870 fully justified their confidence. From that time onward Prussia has been in all things military the model for the nations of Europe. Over the whole continent of Europe the Prussian military system prevails, and it has been accepted by non-European states like Turkey and Japan.

The problem before Mr. Cardwell. Secret of success of Prussian system. Its limitations.

In England the Prussian successes made no less profound an impression than elsewhere. They strengthened the existing movement for army reform. At the same time they gave it an imitative tendency which was not altogether advantageous. In 1868 Mr. Cardwell became Secretary of State for War, a position he occupied till 1874. During his period of office was inaugurated that thorough re modelling of the whole British military system which, although not completed till 1881, will always be connected with his name. Before proceeding to a description of the Cardwellian reorganisation it may perhaps be as well to consider what was the problem Mr. Cardwell was called upon to solve, the directions in which the example of Prussia suggested reforms, and the possible solutions that might have been found. The defects of the then existing British system have already been referred to. They may be summarised as: lack of education and scientific preparation for war on the part of officers and on the part of the Army viewed as a

whole; faulty organisation as exhibited on the one hand in the overcentralisation of the Regular Army and on the other in the absolute lack of any organic connection with the Militia and Volunteer forces; want of elasticity both in the Line and the Militia which left no room for sudden expansion in case of emergencies; conditions of service which made it difficult to secure a sufficient supply of recruits. Against each of these defects the Prussian system could set a corresponding excellence. The secret of Prussian success lay in the absolute supremacy assigned to intellectual ability throughout the Army—a supremacy which found its highest expression in the great general staff whose business was to think out in peace every possible contingency of war; in a completely decentralised organisation by which each military district was to all intents and purposes a separate army; in short service, which enabled an enormous force of men trained up to a certain moderate standard of efficiency to be thrown into the field almost instantaneously at the outbreak of war; in compulsory universal service which provided excellent material while doing away with all difficulties of recruiting. Of these features the first two were not only the most essential but also the most directly applicable to the circumstances of any other country and any other time. The two latter were conditioned by the peculiar circumstances of a European state liable to be involved at any moment in a life and death struggle with its neighbours, and compelled, as far as its finances and the economic condition of the country permitted, to turn its whole male population into soldiers. On the other hand the Prussian system contained no provision for the carrying on of small or local wars in which less than the whole resources of the nation should be engaged, or for the garrisoning with trained soldiers of distant possessions in times of peace. It contemplated nothing intermediate between the state of peace in which the greater part of the army pursued its ordinary civil occupations, and the state of war in which nearly the whole civil population took the field. It practically dispensed with a standing army, for the so-called standing armies of Prussia and of other European states are in reality nothing more than gigantic training

establishments. Lastly, the Prussian system was based on an estimate of the value of mere numerical superiority which was perhaps justified by a consideration of the state of training of other European armies, by the conditions of the military art at the time, and by the facilities for transport and supply existing in highly civilised regions, but which cannot be regarded as a permanent and universal factor in war.

British military requirements.

The problems with which the British Army had to deal were of a very different character. In the first place it had to maintain in India and the colonies a garrison of considerably over 100,000 men. Secondly, it had to provide for "small" wars of varying dimensions in every quarter of the globe, a task the importance of which can best be realised by remembering that out of the thirty years which preceded Mr. Cardwell's assumption of office the only year in which British soldiers were not engaged in some war or other was 1862, the year in which Great Britain all but went to war with the United States over the *Trent* affair. Thirdly, it was supposed to provide for the defence of the United Kingdom against possible invasion. The means of meeting all these requirements had to be found by voluntary enlistment. On the other hand it was not called upon to raise at a moment's notice anything to compare to the vast forces required by the states of continental Europe. How far was it possible or advisable to adapt the features of the Prussian system to these very complicated requirements?

Education and forethought more essential for British Army than for any other.

The supremacy of brains and the planning out of all operations of war in time of peace are essential to military success all the world over. They were perhaps more important for the British Army than for any other. The Prussian officer was trained for the purpose of fighting in his own country or in neighbouring countries differing from it neither in climate nor in the formation of ground, nor in the features of road, railway, or river, and against enemies whose tactics were substantially the same as his own. The British officer was called upon to serve amid the defiles and precipices of the Himalayas, in the swamps and impenetrable bush of Ashanti, on the rolling open veld of South Africa, on the burning sands of the Sudan; to deal with every con-

ceivable form of transport—railways, steamers, Canadian canoes, elephants, camels, ox wagons, pack mules, negro porters—to face the dropping fire of the Afghan *jezail*, or the hand-to-hand struggle with Zulu or Sudanese, to rush the Maori *pah* or the Pathan's *sangar*. Such tasks required an alertness of mind and body, and a readiness to undertake responsibility far greater than that required to fight on one side or other of the black and white boundary posts that marked off the kingdom of Prussia. Similarly the task of the British Army as a whole was a far more complex one than that of the Prussian. The Prussian system never contemplated more than three possible wars, and Bismarck took care that there should be no danger of Prussia's having to engage single-handed in more than one of these at a time. To the number and variety of wars that the British Army might be called upon to fight there was no limit, and the amount of preparation and foresight devoted to the collecting of information and the planning of operations should have been correspondingly infinite. In fact any radical reform of the British Army based upon the lessons of the Prussian victories should have begun first and foremost by a series of sweeping reforms in military education, promotion, and conditions of service which should make the British officer in professional zeal and knowledge, in mental grasp and self-reliance, the first soldier of his age, and by the creation of a great general staff which should in numbers and ability surpass the Prussian general staff as much as the military problems imposed upon Great Britain surpassed in the variety of their features the comparatively simple problems to be faced by Prussia—a staff which should know the whole world as thoroughly as Moltke's staff knew their Bohemia and Eastern France.

Decentralisation no less important.

Decentralisation is at the root of all sound organisation. Here again the scattered and varied character of the British Empire, the problems created by the difficulties of recruiting and by the various kinds of auxiliary forces, made decentralisation far more essential, though perhaps more difficult to carry out, than in a homogeneous country like Prussia with a homogeneous army, where an order applicable to any one

district would be equally applicable to every other. As regards India the principle was admitted, and the War Office exercised no direct control over the Indian Army. A thorough reform on Prussian lines would have involved the parcelling out of the British Empire and of the United Kingdom into a number of districts each as independent as India itself, and controlling all the forces within it whether white or coloured, regular or auxiliary. The only executive functions of the War Office would be to arrange for the transfer of the foreign service troops, recruited by the several home districts, to their respective districts abroad, to maintain the efficiency and uniformity of all the districts by a thorough system of inspection, and to keep sole control of a small force at home always under arms for immediate embarkation.

No question of universal service. How far was short service applicable? Various possible solutions.

There remain the two other features of the Prussian system, viz., short service and universal service, which enabled Prussia to bring into the field an enormous army in time of war while maintaining a comparatively small and cheap establishment in time of peace. It has already been observed that these two features, unlike the others, were strictly conditioned by Prussia's geographical position and by Prussian policy. There was no question of introducing universal service in the United Kingdom. Apart from the political impossibility of carrying such a measure at that time, there was no sufficient reason for a nation that already paid for a great navy as its first line of defence, and that had, in any case, to pay for a large colonial army, to take upon itself the heavy burden of maintaining armaments in the Continental style. What British policy demanded was a fairly large force to defend the United Kingdom against a landing carried out during the absence or temporary disablement of the Channel Fleet, and a greater elasticity for the foreign service army which should enable the ordinary establishment to be raised considerably for the purpose of an important foreign war such as the Crimean War, or the suppression of the Mutiny, and get over difficulties of recruiting. There were several ways in which the problem might have been solved. The solution which offered the truest analogy to the Prussian system, and which would un-

doubtedly have been the best, though it would have required courage to carry it out, would have been to convert the Militia bodily into an efficient short-service army for home defence, with a large reserve and a large permanent body of officers, and with a due proportion of artillery and mounted troops similarly organised. At a very moderate peace expenditure, an army of 200,000, or more, could thus be mobilised at once in case of any danger of invasion, and, if necessary, rapidly enlarged for a great national emergency by the enforcement of the Ballot Act. The Regular Army would not have been directly augmented by this, and might even, for reasons of economy, have had to be cut down, but the fact that the very last man of it could be sent abroad without imperilling the safety of the British Isles would have added enormously to its offensive strength, and by enlisting in it only men who had served in the Militia, its efficient establishment would have been very largely increased. This solution, though the most effective and economical for ordinary purposes, contained no provision, under the existing constitution, for the sending abroad of an army of several hundred thousand men, beyond the patriotism of the Militia and the rapid raising of new corps. An alternative solution was to create a short-service Regular Army whose object should be, firstly, to provide a large Reserve, and, secondly, to act as trainer and feeder to a long-service army, of which all, except a small expeditionary force, should be stationed abroad. The short-service army would be usually at home and provide for home defence, but it would also, for a great national struggle, provide a large field army for foreign service. By no one has this solution been more ably advocated in the past than by the present Commander-in-Chief.* Lastly, it might have been possible to make no definite division between short-service and long-service soldiers, but simply to do away with the system of long engagements, and allow any one who had completed his training to pass into the Reserve at any time most convenient to himself,

* *Cf.* Lord Roberts's article on "Free Trade in the Army," *Nineteenth Century*, 1884, reprinted 1901. With such a system the Militia might very well for economy's sake have been abolished.

subject, of course, to some reasonable period of notice. Such a system, which thoroughly recognised the voluntary character of the soldier's contract, would have greatly favoured recruiting, and would in practice have differed very little from the one discussed just before, as those soldiers who once over-stayed their first two or three years would, in most cases, prefer to continue, and make the Army their career. The various proportions of long-service men, short-service men, and Reserves would, on such a system, have to be regulated by the inducements offered to each class. Any of the three solutions enumerated, or a combination of them, would have provided for a considerable addition to the efficient forces of the country without great increase of military expenditure.

Educational and general reforms. Their inadequacy.

The actual remodelling of the British forces was worked out on lines very different to those contemplated above. On the first head, that of the introduction of scientific methods, a certain amount was done. Purchase was abolished in 1871, and the ground cleared for further reforms. From 1875 onwards, with slight exceptions, all commissions in the Army have been given as the result of competitive literary examination. Promotion from lieutenant to captain and from captain to major was made conditional on the passing of qualifying examinations in professional subjects. To a very limited extent the principle of promotion by selection was introduced. The study of military science was encouraged. An intelligence division of the War Office was created out of the old topographical department. Manœuvres, which had been completely neglected, were revived, though the absence of a proper Manœuvres Act hampered all efforts to secure really practical training. All these reforms were excellent in themselves and marked a great advance on the state of affairs existing before 1870. But compared with the requirements of the service they were far from adequate. The examinations were merely negative, and not always satisfactory, tests of ability. Apart from them little was done to make the career of the officer a continual process of education and selection, and to free him from the fossilising influences of routine occupations. The understaffed intelli-

gence department, and the Staff College, with its purely theoretical course of training, were but poor substitutes for the Prussian General Staff, at once the brains of the Prussian Army and the school in which its officers learnt the art of war, in direct contact with the practical preparation for it, and under the immediate supervision of the actual chief of the Army. That more was not done was not altogether the fault of Mr. Cardwell and the reformers of his school. They had to contend, on the one hand, with the apathy of politicians and of the nation, and, on the other, with the strongest opposition from the conservative elements in the army itself. The Duke of Cambridge, who had been commander-in-chief since 1856, was a thorough-going representative of the old school, and for more than twenty years was destined to interpose the weight of his authority against all change. Politicians who readily voted money for the maintenance of a certain number of men suspected all schemes for making those men efficient as the inspirations of a dangerous spirit of militarism.

The Territorial System.

In the direction of decentralisation and localisation important and beneficial changes were effected in the Cardwellian era. The United Kingdom was divided into twelve district commands, under generals supposed to be responsible for the inspection and well-being of all the forces, whether Regulars, Militia, or Volunteers, in their commands. These commands were again subdivided into sixty-seven regimental districts, each being the recruiting ground of a territorial infantry regiment, consisting usually of two of the old battalions of the Line, two battalions of Militia, such Volunteer battalions as existed in the district, and a regimental depôt. The officer commanding the district was made responsible for the recruiting for both Line and Militia, for the training of the recruits at the depôt, for the inspection and training of the Militia and Volunteers, and for the payment of the Reservists. There was much make-believe in the new territorial system. Cavalry and artillery were not included in it. There was no question of the territorial regiment ever forming a unit for fighting purposes, not even of the home battalions of Regulars being quartered in their own districts. The districts,

which had been mapped out so as to contain about equal populations of 200,000, were by no means always equal in recruiting capacity. Much resentment was caused in the Regular Army by the swamping of the time-honoured traditions connected with the old regimental numbers in the new territorial names. Nevertheless the territorial system has been, on the whole, a distinct success. Interest in the Army has been focussed locally, and the association with historical regiments has benefited recruiting both for Militia and for Volunteers. But here again, although a system of local organisation was introduced, the real spirit of decentralisation was never given free play. The generals commanding districts still remained so tied down by regulations, so narrowly restricted in the application of the funds placed at their disposal, that the great mass of the business of the Army continued to be transacted in the War Office, at the cost of the efficiency both of the War Office and of the various districts.*

The Cardwellian short service. Its advantages.

So far we have seen that the reforms inaugurated by Mr. Cardwell, though right in their general direction, were hardly thorough and sweeping enough, and that even where the framework of reforms was set up little was done subsequently to inculcate the spirit of them into the mass of the Army. It was very different with the question of reforming the conditions of service. Here, where the peculiar circumstances of the British Army demanded the greatest circumspection and care in adapting from a model framed to meet so utterly different requirements, the reformers went to work with surprising boldness and self-confidence. It was obviously impossible to maintain a large army at fighting strength abroad with the Prussian system of only three years' colour-service. It was no less impossible to create a Reserve on the principle of life-service. The reformers resolved to "split the difference" and find some mean period which should provide simultaneously a foreign service army, a home service army

* The Decentralisation Committee of 1898 showed how little had been done to carry out Mr. Cardwell's ideas, and urged several useful reforms. Its recommendations had, however, borne little fruit before the outbreak of the war.

and a Reserve. A period of six years with the colours and six with the Reserve (afterwards modified to seven and five respectively) was fixed upon, and a most complicated and ingenious mechanism devised, by means of which half the Army was maintained at war strength abroad, while the other half was kept at home at a reduced strength, to be filled up in case of war by the calling out of Reserves. Battalions were linked together, and afterwards incorporated in territorial regiments, in such a fashion that of every pair one should be at home and the other abroad. No attempt was made to create a reserve for the Militia, the one force for which the problem offered no difficulties. It is hard to find any explanation for this, except that the reformers had no real belief in the military value of the force. Nor, in view of the difficulties of recruiting, was it thought advisable to call up reservists for any period of training. The scheme was not without its merits. The period of colour-service was long enough to create a good class both of soldier and of reservist. It was short enough, on the other hand, to dispense with many of the vexed questions of pensions and soldiers' marriages which attend a long-service army. The Cardwellian system of short service has since its institution succeeded in keeping the army abroad in a state of high efficiency, and the present war has shown that it has created a considerable reserve and provided arrangements for meeting the enormous wastage of a protracted war.

Radical defects of the Cardwellian system.

None the less, the system was radically defective. It proved ruinously expensive, both directly and indirectly; it failed to overcome the recruiting difficulty or to meet the military requirements of the Empire. To begin with, the cardinal pivot of the whole system, viz., the absolute equality in numbers of the battalions abroad and those at home, was as absurd, as a theory of Imperial defence, as it was incapable in practice of meeting the current demands of Imperial policy. It could only be set on foot by a dangerously large reduction of the colonial garrisons. It completely destroyed the elasticity of the old army system, and made it impossible to increase the strength of the army abroad by a single battalion, except as a temporary measure, without recourse

to Parliament for authorisation to raise two new battalions in its place. As a matter of fact the number of battalions abroad has been greater than those at home almost ever since the system was instituted, and the result has been confusion and the postponement of vital considerations of military policy on the part of the War Office to the task of keeping up the pleasing fiction of equality. Even apart from the causes tending to upset the theoretical equilibrium of the system, it was only found possible to keep up the efficiency of the battalions abroad by reducing the home battalions to the state of training depôts — "squeezed lemons," as Lord Wolseley aptly called them. The scheme contained no provision for small wars short of calling out the Reserves or of creating composite forces skimmed from a number of different units. But the calling out of Reserves for such purposes was injurious to recruiting by making it more difficult for reservists to gain employment, while the mixing up of units has always been condemned as contrary to all principles of military efficiency. Nor was it possible under the new system to move troops from England to any part of the Empire for the purposes of diplomatic pressure or as a military precaution.

Its disregard of the conditions of voluntary service. The "specials." Lord Airey's and Lord Wantage's committees.

But the great defect of the system lay in its complete disregard of the elementary conditions of voluntary service. The term of service had been fixed by purely actuarial calculations and with absolutely no regard for the personal interests of the soldier. To quote Lord Roberts's own words, it was "perhaps as fatal a period as could have been fixed upon, whether the convenience and welfare of the soldier, or the interests of the State be considered." It provided no career for the private soldier, while it kept him in the Army till he was too old, as a rule, to begin life again with success. All the unnecessary rigidity of the old system as to terms of service, all the petty restrictions and stoppages which still survived from the traditions of the eighteenth century were retained. Again, the old pay of a shilling a day meant much more to the recruit when it implied permanent employment and a pension to follow, than the same sum given for seven years only. In other

words the new system,* in the face of a great recruiting difficulty, mainly due to mere insufficiency of the inducement offered, deliberately diminished that inducement in the belief that the soldier would not detect the difference. The disregard of the soldier's interests which underlay the whole principle of the seven years' service soon revenged itself upon its authors. The physical standard of recruits was rapidly forced down. Very soon it was found necessary to take in "specials"—that is to say, boys below even the reduced standard, with the idea of developing them by good food and a careful system of gymnastic training. Nor were conditions of service which appealed only to the improvident likely to raise the social or intellectual level of recruits. The "absent-minded beggar" was distinctly a product of the Cardwellian system. But the man who is improvident in the choice of his means of livelihood is not unlikely to be improvident on the march and incapable of that mental concentration on the task before him that makes the really efficient soldier. Much was undoubtedly done to remedy the moral and intellectual, as well as the physical, defects of the recruit once he entered the Army. But the business of an army, especially of a voluntary army, is to be an efficient fighting machine and not a nursery, however beneficial, for the wastrels of lower class society. Against the saving on the pensions vote should be set the "nursery" vote and the heavy wastage from desertion, physical unfitness, and other causes which was a natural correlative of the enlistment of the improvident and the feeble. The Zulu and Afghan wars were not long in bringing to light some of the bad results of the new system. They were fully set forth by the strong military committee under the presidency of Lord Airey, whose report was published in

* No attempt is made in these pages to discriminate between the system as it existed in the minds of its authors, Cardwell, Colley, Home, etc., and the system as it was carried out in practice. The reformers, no doubt, contemplated fullgrown and physically well-developed recruits and not "specials." But they failed to foresee what this would cost. The Government accepted the new scheme, but never contemplated the increase in pay which alone could have made the scheme efficient.

1881.* The committee made a number of practical suggestions for the improvement of the system—facilities to be given on the one hand to soldiers in home battalions to join the Reserve after three or four years' service, and on the other to twenty-five per cent. of those who had served their time and wished to stay on in the Army to extend their service for pension; the creation of efficient training depôts and the doing away with the linked battalion system—suggestions which were ignored as tending to impair the theoretical perfection of the new system. Sooner than adopt any of these measures or face the question of the soldier's pay the authorities preferred, as was shown by Lord Wantage's Committee in 1892, to enlist some 13,000 "specials" annually out of a total of 36,000 recruits. In the decade preceding the South African War there were on an average with the colours in any year 50,000 men who on the score of youth or lack of physique were unfit for service abroad, or even for hard work anywhere. It is only after subtracting these figures from the total available Reserve that we arrive at the net numerical gain of the Cardwell system. And when that gain is set over against the increase in the Army Estimates in the period since 1870, it will be found small indeed. In short, the whole system was wasteful and extravagant to a degree, but the paternal devotion of the War Office authorities, who spared neither labour nor ingenuity in the task of patching it up, and the misdirected liberality of the British taxpayer enabled it to hold its own for a whole generation.

Patchings and re-patchings.

It would be too long a task to detail all the patching and repatching the system underwent during that generation, the frequent fluctuations introduced into the term of service—generally in the direction of lengthening it—so that by 1899 the average duration was nearer eight years than seven, while in that year nearly 5000 re-enlisted soldiers were with the

* Lord Airey's committee showed that, without including those discharged as physically unfit, over 29 per cent. of recruits left the Army with an average of two years' service, and it has been reckoned that since then on an average no less than 48 per cent. were from one cause or another lost to the Army before being qualified to enter the Reserve.

ranks to help out the difficulties of recruiting; the additions made to the number of battalions, not on any ground of military policy, but in order to shore up the linked battalion system; the quartering of the Guards at Gibraltar for the same purpose; the creation of Class A of the Reserves, receiving a shilling a day on condition of rejoining the colours at any moment without waiting for the formal calling out of the Reserves; the creation of a class (D) of men continuing in the Reserves for four years after the expiration of their term. A slight increase in pay was made in 1898 by giving men over nineteen years of age a messing allowance which brought their net pay nearly up to the nominal shilling a day. Permissive three years' service, which already existed in the Guards, where it worked successfully, was introduced into the Line in the same year, but with little success, as the three years' recruit was offered lower pay than those who enlisted for the ordinary term.

Position at the outbreak of the South African War.

The results of the system can best be judged by the state of affairs in England at the outbreak of the South African War. At that time there were 106,000 men with the colours and 78,000 in the First Class Army Reserve. There was practically no force at all which could have been despatched at once to meet an emergency. Nor could there have been any question of sending abroad immediately after mobilisation anything approaching to the nominal total of over 180,000 men. For the Reserves, which were supposed to complete the standing force to war strength, were in practice required to supersede that half of it which was unfit for service. The inefficient half of the active army thus became the real reserve, and was gradually sent to the front as it matured to efficiency during the war. In this case, fortunately, time was given us in abundance, and by the end of April, 1901, some 180,000 Regulars were sent out to South Africa. Considering the money spent upon the British Army that condition of affairs cannot be regarded as satisfactory either in respect of the numbers immediately available, or in respect of the power of expansion possessed by the system.

The most important changes in the period that followed the final completion of the Cardwell system are those con-

cerned with the central organisation of the Army and with its relation to the civil power as represented by the civilian Secretary of State. In the beginning of 1888 considerable administrative changes were effected in the War Office organisation, the general effect of which was to concentrate all responsibility in the Commander-in-Chief. But the new organisation was not considered altogether satisfactory. It was over-centralised and there was little real responsibility. It contained no proper provision for the consultative as distinguished from the executive and administrative duties of the Army, nothing in fact to correspond to the General Staff of the German Army. These are questions of organisation and efficiency. But apart from these the centralisation of all power in the Commander-in-Chief introduced a difficult political question. It deprived the Secretary of State, in other words the Government, of all effective control of the Army, and tended to create a divorce of military administration from policy which was not in itself desirable and was not to be found in any other country. That divorce could be obviated either by making the Secretary of State's control real—in which case the office of Commander-in-Chief became superfluous—or else by bringing the Commander-in-Chief into the Cabinet, in which alternative the Secretary of State simply became his mouthpiece in Parliament. This was the problem which presented itself to the Commission appointed a few months later under the presidency of Lord Hartington (now Duke of Devonshire). Of the members of the Commission, Lord Randolph Churchill stood alone in advocating the latter alternative. His scheme involved the abolition of the Secretary of State for War and the Board of Admiralty and the creation of a Commander-in-Chief and a Lord High Admiral, who were to be Lords and Members of the Privy Council, and were to be summoned to all Cabinet councils where military or naval questions should be discussed. Each was to have a financial secretary in the House of Commons, and the two were to be linked together and kept under the financial control of Parliament by a Secretary of State for the Sea and Land Forces of the Crown. The Commission as a

Central organisation of the Army. Hartington Commission. The "chief of the staff." Ignorance of the politicians.

body, however, decided upon the former alternative, and suggested the abolition of the Commander-in-Chief and the division of his functions among five principal officers, viz., (1) a Chief of the Staff, whose duties would be to advise the Secretary of State on matters of military policy, and on all questions concerning the strength, distribution and mobilisation of the forces, to collect information and prepare schemes of defence or attack, to draw up an annual report of the military requirements of the Empire, and to keep in touch on the one hand with general officers commanding, and on the other with the various departments of State, more especially with the Admiralty and the Foreign Office; (2) an Adjutant-General, responsible for the discipline, training and education of the Army; (3) a Quartermaster-General, responsible for supplies and transport; (4) a Director of Artillery, and (5) an Inspector-General of Fortifications. The executive duties of the command in Great Britain were to be delegated to a general commanding the forces in Great Britain. The essence of the scheme lay, firstly, in the separate and complete responsibility of each of the military heads of departments; and, secondly, in the creation of the Chief of the Staff's office. The importance of thought in military matters was, one might have hoped, at last recognised and an opening created for a really great military reformer. Unfortunately, military affairs were but little understood by politicians at the time. How little can best be gathered by reading the minute * in which Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, a member of the Committee (and soon afterwards Secretary of State for War), expressed his strong dissent from the proposal to create a Chief of the Staff on the ground that the British Empire could have no "general military policy," that such wars as it might have to wage were better muddled through than provided for, and that the thinking over possible wars might insidiously suggest a wish to provoke them, and thus be "a danger to our best interests."

Order in Council of 1895. A compromise.

For the moment nothing was done, but in 1895, on the resignation of the Duke of Cambridge, considerable changes were made on the lines of the recommendations of

* C. 5979, p. 29, *sqq.*

FIELD MARSHAL VISCOUNT WOLSELEY, K.P., P.C., G.C.B.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. NOV., 1895.

From a Photograph specially taken for this work by Histed, Baker Street.

the Hartington Commission. The system of separate departmental responsibility was introduced. On the other hand the recommendations for the creation of a Chief of the Staff's department and for the abolition of the position of Commander-in-Chief were met by a compromise by which the title of Commander-in-Chief was retained, while the functions allotted to the post were a cumulation of those which the Commission assigned to the Chief of the Staff, those of the General Officer Commanding the forces in Great Britain, and certain of the functions with regard to promotions and appointments which had been assigned to the Adjutant-General, together with a general supervision over all the military departments of the War Office. It is perhaps to be regretted that the Hartington scheme was not adopted in its entirety. The duties still left for the Commander-in-Chief were far too complicated and numerous to be efficiently performed by any one man. Nevertheless the scheme was not unworkable, and with certain modifications, in the direction of devolving the details of administrative and executive work from the shoulders of the Commander-in-Chief, it might have satisfied all reasonable requirements. But the new organisation had little opportunity of taking firm root or attaining to its proper development in the four years that passed before the outbreak of the South African War. The chief command was entrusted to Lord Wolseley, a soldier who had not only distinguished himself in many a campaign and in a long career in the War Office, but had always been a strenuous advocate of army reform, and had done more than any living man to increase the efficiency of the British Army. Unfortunately the appointment came some ten years too late. The task of creating a new office, with varied functions which had never been exercised before, of giving flesh and blood to the skeleton outline indicated by the definitions of an Order in Council, was one that required a physical vigour, a freshness of mind, and a power of organisation that are given to few men even in the prime of life. Added to the difficulty of this task was the misunderstanding as to its whole nature associated with the retention of the old title. Lord Wolseley's whole life as a soldier had taught him to connect with the

Lord Wolseley as Commander-in-Chief.

title of Commander-in-Chief the exercise of a direct control over all the departments which he missed under the new scheme, and for which he did not find a substitute in the planning of possibly remote campaigns. Nor, it must be admitted, was there that complete sympathy between the new Commander-in-Chief and the Government which would encourage the former to persist in pressing the measures which he advocated against the normal inertia of politicians. The result was a sense of powerlessness which from the very start disheartened the new Commander-in-Chief, and which augured ill for the great hopes of reform which had been associated with Lord Wolseley's appointment. Lord Wolseley was still able to do much useful work along the old lines. The frankness with which he on various occasions, and notably in a speech at Glasgow in the summer of 1897, laid bare the inadequacy of our military establishments, and the earnestness with which he urged the duty of the Government to make preparation before it was too late, did great service and helped to awaken the national consciousness out of the self-satisfied full-bellied drowsiness in which it had so long rested, and against which military reformers had so often contended in vain. But the central organisation of the Army remained in a state of animated suspense. The old arrangements had been nominally superseded, but the new ones showed no signs of real vitality. The new chief command remained a curtailed image of the old, but without developing at all into the great consultative-advisory office it might have become. The planning of war in time of peace and the devising of broad schemes of Imperial defence based on Imperial requirements remained ideals as remote to all intents and purposes from their realisation as if the Hartington Commission had never been.

Military history of British Army since Crimea. Warfare in South Africa.

The history of the British Army during the second half of the nineteenth century is however very far from being confined to a mere series of structural changes in its organisation. Throughout almost the whole of that period British soldiers have been engaged in military operations of more or less importance in some part of the world. As with Rome of old, so with the British Empire of to-day, the gates

of the temple of Janus are but rarely closed.* In no part of the world, except India, had the British Army seen more fighting than in South Africa. From the very first days of the British occupation there had been wars with the turbulent Kaffir tribes on the eastern border of Cape Colony, and for more than half a century the Cape was one of the largest military stations in the Empire, and the scene of constant sanguinary wars. Of special South African experience there was no lack among those responsible for the conduct of the present war. To begin with the War Office, Lord Wolseley and Sir Evelyn Wood—of whom the former had himself once been Administrator of the Transvaal, and the latter, as the unwilling mouthpiece of Mr. Gladstone's Government, had negotiated the terms of peace after Majuba —Sir H. Brackenbury and Sir C. Mansfield Clarke, had all taken part in the Zulu War. So had Sir F. Forestier-Walker and Sir W. Penn Symons, the two generals commanding at the Cape and in Natal at the outbreak of the war. Sir Redvers Buller had served with distinction in South Africa, and of other senior officers with South African experience it is sufficient to mention the names of Clery, Methuen, Ian Hamilton, Baden-Powell, Warren, Hutton, Smith-Dorrien, Hector Macdonald, C. E. Knox, Rundle, Tucker, Hart, Carrington, Clements, Douglas, Richardson. Nothing was more galling to the British inhabitants of South Africa than the claim so persistently put forward by the Boers that the

* Some idea of the military task involved in maintaining the British Empire, even in a generation untroubled by conflicts with any of the great military powers of the world, is given by a mere list of the chief wars and expeditions since the Crimea: 1856–57, Persian War; 1856–60, third Chinese War; 1857–59, Indian Mutiny; 1858, North-West Frontier of India; 1861, Sikkim; 1860–61, second New Zealand War; 1863, North-West Frontier; 1863–65, third New Zealand War; 1864–65, Bhootan; 1865, Jamaica insurrection; 1867, Abyssinian War; 1868, North-West Frontier; 1870, Red River expedition; 1871–72, North-West Frontier; 1873, first Ashanti War; 1875, Perak; 1877–78, Jowakhi campaign; 1877–78, fourth Kaffir War; 1878–79, Zulu War; 1879, Sikukuni War; 1878–80, second Afghan War; 1880, Basuto War; 1881, Transvaal insurrection; 1882, Egyptian War; 1885–90, first Sudan War; 1885–89, Burmese War; 1888–93, North-West Frontier; 1894, East Africa; 1895, Chitral; 1896, Matabele War; 1897, Ashanti; 1897–99, North-West Frontier; 1896–1900, second Sudan War.

whole of South Africa was theirs by right of conquest from the natives, and the assertion that the British Government had filched away by stealth the land which had been purchased by the blood and toil of Afrikanders. Long before the present war British soldiers and British colonists had by their blood, shed on many a hard-fought field, earned the right to equality with the Boer.

Influence of savage warfare. Its dangers. Lessons in organisation and resource.

The influence on the character of the British Army of the constant succession of these wars is one which differentiated it to a great extent from all the armies of Europe. At any moment, even after the Cardwellian changes, the British Army contained a very large number not only of officers and non-commissioned officers, but of soldiers who had seen active service, and there were few of its generals that had not been through half-a-dozen different campaigns. It has often been said that fighting against inferior foes impairs the quality of an army, that it conduces to reckless over-confidence, to a supreme belief in the virtues of improvisation, to neglect of strategy and to slovenly tactics, to medal-hunting and to the promotion to high commands of men who have won cheap laurels by supervising the shooting down of ill-armed savages. There is some justification for this criticism, and the opening stages of the South African War gave abundant evidence of the unwarranted contempt entertained by our leading authorities for their opponents, of the neglect of ordinary tactical precautions, of the failure of high officers to fulfil the great expectations entertained of them. But there is another side to the picture. These wars against savages were by no means the child's play that foreign critics have often asserted. The physical difficulties to be overcome were often enormous, and the economy of the British Government usually took care that the force sent was only barely adequate to the task imposed upon it. Not only did these wars give a training in courage and endurance that no peace manœuvres could supply, but the variety of their conditions taught lessons of resourcefulness and adaptability that went far to compensate for the many defects of our army-training in peace time. Our senior officers possessed a rich fund of experience in all matters connected with transport

and supply, the dealing with natives, the amount of work that white soldiers can do in various climates, and a score of similar matters that no other army could claim and which helped to remedy the absence of special organisation for the studying of the conditions of possible wars in all quarters of the globe. It is so easy, in following the course of the South African War, to criticise the blunders of the War Office, the mistakes of our generals, the unfitness for modern warfare of most of our military training, that one is too apt to forget the far more serious failure there might have been. The army in South Africa was suitably clothed, it was excellently fed; at a distance of many hundreds of miles from bases on the coast, themselves many thousands of miles from England, it was kept supplied with food, with ammunition, with remounts and reinforcements; its strategical mobility was ensured by an admirable railway and wagon transport. Failure in any one of these particulars might have meant disaster to the whole campaign. That there was not failure but success was due to the practical experience stored up in the minds not only of the chiefs who organised, but of the subordinates who had to carry out their instructions. To the public at home, and to impatient critics who had summed up for themselves the whole tactical lessons of the war in a few weeks, it often seemed as if British officers would never learn. But we may well doubt whether any army with a less varied experience would have adapted itself as quickly as ours to such entirely novel conditions. Practical experience in India and elsewhere had created in many of our officers a profound scepticism as to the value of the regulation methods of attack. It took time to gauge the full possibilities of lateral extension that modern conditions have made necessary on open country, but even in the earliest engagements Aldershot formations were unceremoniously dispensed with for looser lines of advance, while use was made of cover as freely as the nature of the ground and the inadequate training of the soldiers allowed. It is less surprising, when we consider the tactical instruction given at manœuvres, whether in England or in Europe, that this or that general occasionally marched his men into fire in close order than that it was not

done more often, and that it was not persisted in regardless of consequences.

Any less experienced army would have failed utterly in South Africa.

There has been so much contemptuous military criticism in Europe of British operations in South Africa that it is perhaps worth while considering in what respects the war would have been conducted differently by any other European army, such as, for instance, the Germans, supposing always that they could have transported their troops without difficulty to South Africa. In the first place the tactics employed in the field would probably have been even more conservative than the British. Time after time the attempt would have been made to rush a position by sheer weight of numbers, and time after time the attempt would have been repulsed, or a useless position occupied with losses compared to which ours have been trifling. Even when the generals had realised the necessity of altering their tactics it is doubtful how far the conscript soldier could ever have been brought to attack positions like the steep heights that front the Tugela without the moral support afforded by close order. But apart from questions of tactics it must be remembered that practically not a single officer or man in an army like the German has had any experience of tropical or subtropical countries, has ever been fifty miles from a railway, or ten miles from a village large enough to feed a division for a week. Is it likely that an army whose experience was confined to Brandenburg and Westphalia would have made fewer mistakes than one whose commander-in-chief, adjutant-general, and quartermaster-general—not to speak of the majority of the senior officers at the front—had all had actual experience of campaigning in South Africa? There is no reason for believing either that any European army could have kept nearly so large a force in the field without a hopeless failure in supply and transport and the whole of the complicated organisation on which expeditionary campaigns depend, or that, if it could, it would have succeeded in doing all that British and Colonial soldiers have done. France or Germany could no more have sent an army to Pretoria than Lord Roberts could have marched to Paris or Berlin. Whatever the criticisms it may be necessary to pass in this and succeeding volumes upon the

British military system and upon the conduct of operations during the war, the standard of comparison will always be, not the armies of continental Europe, but the British Army such as it ought to be and such as it may yet become if properly developed on its own lines.

General resemblances between British and Continental military systems.

At the same time it is hardly necessary to point out that in many of their most important features British military organisation and British fighting methods were identical with those of other European nations. The division into the three fighting "arms," viz., infantry armed with rifles and bayonets, cavalry armed with swords or lances and carbines, and artillery provided with heavier long-range weapons, the classification into officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, the organisation in companies, battalions, brigades, divisions, and army corps, were features which the British Army possessed in common with other European armies, and the theory and practice of warfare as entertained and practised by the chiefs of the British Army were on the whole modelled upon the theory and practice of the Continent. There were, however, important differences, some of which have already been discussed in the account given of the changes introduced in the British Army since the Crimean War.

Voluntary character of British system.

In the first place the British system was entirely voluntary. Though, in theory, there could be compulsion both in England and in some of the colonies to serve in the Militia in case of emergency, there was in practice no obligation upon the citizen, as such, to acquire any military training even of the most superficial kind. Whether in the Regular Army, in the Militia, or the Volunteers, whether from the desire to earn a reputation or a competence, from a taste for the military life or from a feeling of patriotism, the British soldier in all ranks served of his own personal initiative.*

Variety of forces. Employment of coloured troops.

Coupled with the voluntary character of the British system and with the diversity of the countries and races that make up the British Empire was the immense variety of the

* The solitary exception to the above rule is that of the Channel Islands Militia, a force raised by universal service from the population of the Channel Islands, and undergoing a very short annual training.

kinds of forces maintained. In Great Britain alone there were Regulars, Militia, Yeomanry, and Volunteers, each with their own terms of service and standard of efficiency. In each of the self-governing colonies there was a small permanent organisation, a force of Militia or Volunteers, and a more or less vague Militia or Volunteer reserve force available for emergencies. In India there was besides the regular garrison of white troops a white volunteer force 30,000 strong. But besides European troops the British system comprised large auxiliary forces composed of soldiers of other races. In India there was a regular army of some 150,000 men, recruited mainly among the more warlike tribes of the peninsula and officered by English officers, to which may be added another 18,000 Imperial Service troops, maintained by the native states but at the disposal of the Imperial Government. Similar native forces existed in other colonies, such as, for instance, the West India Regiment, raised from West Indian negroes, and this class of auxiliary troops was greatly increased during the years preceding the war, when a large number of new forces, such as the West African Frontier Force, the West African Regiment, the East Africa Rifles, the Uganda Rifles, Central Africa Regiment, etc., were raised for the maintenance of order in those wide territories which fell to the British Empire as part of the general partition of Africa. The latest experiment in the direction of new forces was the Chinese Regiment of Infantry raised after the occupation of Wei-hai-wei in 1898. Practically included in the British military system was the Egyptian Army, composed of Egyptians and Sudanese, under a British commander-in-chief and partly officered by British officers. This feature of the British military system, viz., the employment of large forces of soldiers of different races held together simply by their confidence in their white officers, is one which most strikingly distinguished it from European armies. A fuller discussion of it, however, hardly enters into the scope of the present work, as, for sound political reasons, no native troops of any kind were employed in South Africa. It may, however, be worth noting that it was with the help of these native troops that the British Empire was able, concurrently with the

South African War, to carry on lesser operations both in China and in Ashanti.

Mounted infantry and machine guns.

As regards the white regular forces the maintenance abroad at war strength of half the Army, the comparatively long service of seven years with the colours, and the consequent smallness of the Reserve, are the chief points in organisation which marked them off from the real short-service armies of continental Europe. A distinct tactical feature of the British system lay in the tentative development of mounted infantry. The value of highly mobile riflemen had been conspicuously shown in the American Civil War, and had impressed itself deeply on the imagination of military students like Sir G. Chesney, who saw in them the ideal troops of the future. In various expeditions in India, South Africa, and the Sudan infantry mounted on ponies or camels had proved most effective. But it was not till 1888 that a scheme for the regular training of detachments from infantry battalions, and a system of mounted infantry drill, were drawn up by Major (now Sir E. T. H.) Hutton. On some of the foreign stations, notably in South Africa, even before the war, one company of every battalion was regularly maintained as mounted infantry. The volunteer forces of many of the colonies likewise included a large proportion of mounted rifles. When the South African War broke out the British Army contained not only a large body of men who had been trained as mounted infantry but, more important still, a number of keen officers who had devoted themselves to the study of mounted infantry tactics, and were burning for an opportunity to put their theories to the test. The success of the mounted forces in South Africa owes more than is sometimes realised to the long work of preparation carried on before the war by the mounted infantry enthusiasts. Another feature in which the British Army to some slight extent anticipated the lessons of the war was in the use of automatic quick-firing guns attached to infantry and cavalry. As was the case with mounted infantry this feature was largely developed in the course of the war, and both promise to become typical of the British Army in the future.

As regards infantry tactics the British Army still pre-

British infantry tactics. Predominance of old-fashioned traditions.

served a strong tradition, dating back to Waterloo, Quebec, and Dettingen, in favour of solid line formations, mechanical precision, strict fire discipline, and bayonet charges, a tradition which survived the lessons of the Prussian wars and was strengthened by experiences in warfare with such opponents as the Zulus and Sudanese, who were formidable, not through the possession of firearms, but through the desperate bravery of their attack—an attack which however usually failed against the solid phalanx of a British square. But there was a newer school among British officers, especially among those who had had experience of fighting against the well-armed straight-shooting tribes of the Indian frontier, who were convinced that the tactics of the future would lie in individual skill with the rifle, in open order formations, and in a careful use of cover. Their influence had, however, hardly penetrated to the training-grounds of Aldershot when the war broke out. The official drill books, indeed, showed a truer appreciation of modern conditions of warfare, but in the minds of the majority of officers the parade-ground theory of war, which looked upon all irregularities of the ground as disturbing and incalculable elements interfering with the normal evolution of tactical operations, was still deeply rooted—a fact not unnatural considering that nine-tenths of their training was in the barrack square and on the parade ground. The preserving of mathematically straight lines and fixed intervals, the wheeling of a line of men through an angle with all the precision of a clock dial—this and much other eighteenth-century frippery ruled paramount at inspections and even at manœuvres. Cavalry and artillery tactics were dominated by the same idea. The charge in solid formation, the instantaneous wheeling up of guns into line with correct intervals, and all the other smartness and prancing to which their training was so largely devoted, were things whose whole effectiveness depended on the existence of parade-ground conditions.

Material of British Army. The common soldier.

So far for the more general aspects of the British Army as compared with its rivals. Of the quality of the material of which it was composed, of its training and organisation, a

certain amount has already been said, and it will only be necessary here to touch upon a few of the most salient points.

The men—for reasons which have been already discussed—were recruited mainly from the lower ranks of unskilled labour, especially in the larger towns, and in physique and intelligence were, generally speaking, below the average level of the nation. Once in the Army, however, the raw material was considerably improved. Good food and an admirable system of gymnastic training rapidly developed the physique of the recruits. The habits of discipline and neatness, and the influence of their officers and non-commissioned officers, had an equally good effect on the character of the majority. The social and moral conditions of the soldier's life had been greatly raised in recent years by the efforts of officers, among whom no more prominent example can be quoted than Lord Roberts, to provide them with reasonable comforts and amusements in their barracks, and to keep them from drink and debauchery. Of the military training of the soldiers it is difficult to say much. A considerable amount of time was devoted to instruction in drill, which undoubtedly has its value in the first stages of a soldier's training, though much of it was of a ceremonial character and of little military use; three weeks in the year were devoted to field training, *i.e.*, actual training for military operations; a score of days to route-marching, while the all-important item of shooting was satisfied by the firing of about two hundred rounds per soldier at a fixed target. In all, some two months in the soldier's year were devoted to military training. The rest of his time was spent by the soldier on parades, in mounting guards, in pipe-claying his accoutrements, polishing his buttons, scrubbing the barrack floors, and in general acting as char-woman, gardener, porter, cook, valet, clerk and general servant to the regiment and to his officers. In fact, as a school of military training, the Army was nothing more or less than a gigantic Dotheboys Hall. The fault lay less with the officers, who, as a rule, were eager to teach their men, than with the whole Army system. Many of the unmilitary duties mentioned above had to be done by somebody, and as

the Government would not pay reservists or civilians to do them they had to be done, and done inefficiently, by the soldier at the expense of his military education. For other methods in which time was wasted military traditions were responsible. No small part of the soldier's valuable time was spent in looking after a gaudy, expensive, and unpractical uniform. This uniform had for some years been discarded on active service in favour of the inconspicuous and business-like khaki, but it was retained at home, where it wasted the soldier's time and patience, and where the fear of dirtying it seriously interfered with all practical training, from some notion that in its absence the soldier would cease to have that attraction for servant-maids which was believed to be the chief stimulus to recruiting. Such military training as was given was not very satisfactory. The rapid pattering out to a large squad of men of some passage learned by heart from a text-book was the usual method of instruction, and little or no attempt was made to develop the capacities of the individual. The actual conditions of warfare were studiously disregarded. Shooting practice was at fixed targets, utterly unlike any real target aimed at in battle, and at known ranges. Though war is entirely a country pursuit, hardly anything was done to make the soldier, in England mainly recruited from the town populations, able even to find his way about ordinary country. The results of this training, or rather lack of training, were seen in the South African War. The British Regulars exhibited the greatest courage, the utmost confidence in their officers, the most splendid endurance—all the natural qualities of their race strengthened by the habits of discipline and by the bonds of regimental *esprit de corps*—but their military skill, at least at the beginning of the war, was of the slightest.* They were indifferent shots, careless of cover, slow to comprehend what was taking place, or to grasp the whereabouts of the enemy, always getting surprised or lost, helpless

* The character of the British soldier is well summed up by Captain Slocum, the American military attaché with the British forces: "They have not the individuality or resources of our men, but for indomitable courage, uncomplaining fortitude, and implicit obedience, they are beyond criticism."

without their officers. In a word, the British soldier was well disciplined but ill-trained — one might almost say untrained.

The non-commissioned officers were selected out of the ranks of the men, and represented the best type of the British soldier, whose virtues and defects they shared. They were often experienced campaigners, and their presence did much to keep the untried troops comfortable on the march and in the bivouac, and steady in action. But their training was little more than that of the men, and in the general subordination of military to unmilitary considerations in the Army they were frequently selected more for their capacities as clerks or as a reward for good behaviour than for their military qualities.

The non-commissioned officers.

The efforts made to raise the standard of efficiency and of scientific training among the officers have already been referred to in connexion with the Cardwellian reforms. The movement then inaugurated was continued. Lord Wolseley and Sir Evelyn Wood at home, Lord Roberts in India—to mention only a few of the most prominent among senior officers—had in the face of great difficulties and discouragements done much during the past twenty years to improve the training of officers, both by the theoretical study of military subjects and by the practical experience of manœuvres. The Staff College, an institution for higher military training which was founded in 1858, and had long been a byword for military pedantry, had for some years past been infused with a fresher and more practical spirit under the direction of Colonel (now Major-General Sir H. J.) Hildyard. Throughout the Army there was a considerable number of officers, especially in the junior ranks, who took a keen scientific interest in their profession and availed themselves of every opportunity to acquire knowledge and experience.

Training of officers. Considerable improvement in recent years.

Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the officers of the British Army were still very far from attaining a high standard of military excellence. The abolition of purchase and the introduction of competitive examinations had been intended to throw the door open to ability irrespective of wealth or family

Serious defects. Due mainly to lack of opportunity for training.

connexion. But the low pay, the extravagant expenses imposed upon young officers, partly by the fashion of the Army but quite as much by the want of consideration of the Government, and the absence of promotion by merit in the junior ranks, where such promotion works most effectively as an encouragement, shut out not only the less wealthy but also the majority of those who were conscious of their ability and wished to give it scope. The Army did not get the best brains of the country; still, taken as a whole, the young British officer possessed quite enough natural intelligence to make a good soldier, if that intelligence had been given training to improve it and free play to develop it. But the same vicious system, whose paralysing effects on the training of the ordinary soldier have already been mentioned, stood in the way of all real progress. Far too much of the officer's life was taken up by ceremonial or routine duties. The putting on and off of uniforms, the dawdling outside the rooms of senior officers waiting to present some unnecessary report, the writing of endless minutes and filling up of endless "Army forms," the counting up of the halfpence of the regimental canteen, the inspecting of provisions and stores, the sitting on courts-martial and boards, left the junior officer little time for the all-important tasks of training his subordinates or improving his own attainments. When he had the time there were rarely enough men available to train with any advantage to himself or to them, and when he could get the men together there was no ground on which they could be trained in a practical fashion. Little wonder that under such conditions training tended to be unreal. The absence of all personal initiative, and the over-centralisation of authority, which was not confined to the central administration of the Army but existed right through all ranks of the service, the want of inducements in the way of promotion to encourage proficiency, the mechanical character of the periodical examinations which were of little value either as a test of ability or as a training in military studies, all contributed to dull the wits and discourage the zeal of the younger officers. It need hardly be a cause for surprise that the common sense of many

officers made them feel that playing cricket and polo, or hunting and shooting, were quite as good military training, and infinitely more pleasant, than the ordinary routine duties of their profession, and that all the keenest and most ambitious officers were always thirsting to get transferred to some staff employment in India, in Egypt, or anywhere, instead of staying with their regiments. It was in these special employments and on active service abroad that the British officer acquired such real training as he possessed and gained that resourcefulness and adaptability which stood him in such good stead in South Africa. But those qualities were developed in spite of his ordinary peace training at home and not as a result of it. As regards the experience of the war, what has been said of the soldiers will apply almost equally to their officers. To their courage, their devotion to duty, their power of leading and inspiring their men, their possession of all the moral qualities which bind an army together, no words of praise can do full justice. The simple narrative of the war is the most eloquent eulogy of the British regimental officers. But, like the soldiers they led, they were untrained in the art of war. They had to learn by bitter experience, and in the face of the enemy, many things that might well have been acquired in peace. Nor was it easy for officers who had never been allowed to assume the slightest responsibility suddenly to show that power of initiative which now more than ever is essential to military success.

The generals and their staffs.

The defects of the regimental officers were even more marked in many of the generals. The course of the war showed that among our generals were to be found a few leaders of boldness, tactical insight and organising power, and it has brought to the front many more who at its outbreak were unknown junior officers. But it also revealed the fact that many of our generals, who had risen simply by seniority, were nothing more than rather aged regimental officers, with brains and will-power atrophied by a long life spent in unmilitary routine and in the unintelligent execution of orders, incapable alike of devising a plan or of carrying it into execution. Others, again, had won cheap

reputations by partaking in some successful and popular little expedition, or had risen to high positions by the writing of incisive minutes, or by personal and social influences. There must always be failures when an army, which has long enjoyed immunity from serious conflict, is suddenly brought to the test of a great war, and it must also be remembered that the new conditions our generals were called upon to face in South Africa made that test of the very severest. Still, it is certain that the proportion of failures would have been much less had there been any proper system by which capable officers could have been selected and trained for high command. The failures of the generals were in many cases the failures of their staffs. The British Army did not lack officers possessing both the mental qualities and the scientific knowledge necessary for staff work. But there was no efficient system of selecting them, and no opportunity of training them to co-operate with each other or with the generals under whom they were to serve. That perfect combination which is so essential in a staff can only be attained by working together in peace. Englishmen, who would not dream of sending a crew to Henley Regatta whose members had never rowed together before, were quite content that a general's staff should be hastily improvised at the last moment from officers scraped together from every corner. But if the war showed that staff officers were often inexperienced, unacquainted with their duties or with each other's idiosyncrasies, it was still more frequently the case that the old generals had no conception of how to make use of their staffs. Having had no peace training in generalship, they no more knew how to direct the ability placed at their disposal than the captain of some old three-decker would have known how to handle a modern battleship in action.

The central administration. The Intelligence Department.

What was true of the soldiers, of their officers and of their generals, was no less true of the central administration of the Army. The cares of recruiting, the adjusting of the movement of battalions between the home and foreign stations, the endless correspondence about the pettiest details of local administration, the contrivance of countless rules and regulations to prescribe the actions of every member of the Army

General Sir Henry Evelyn Wood, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

Adjutant-General, October, 1897

From Photo by Bassano.

in every conceivable circumstance, the inventing of expensive and ridiculous man-millinery, absorbed so much of the thought and time of the heads of the Army that little was left for any consideration of military policy.* The failure of the efforts to create a thinking department for the Army has been recounted on a previous page. There was an Intelligence Department. It was directed by a capable chief, Sir John Ardagh, and officers of industry and ability worked in an old house in Queen Anne's Gate at compiling maps and other information about various parts of the world. But it was starved in men and money to an extent that seems hardly credible. Whereas the German General Staff employed over three hundred officers and spent altogether some £270,000 a year, the Intelligence and Mobilization Divisions of the British Army employed some seventeen officers at a cost of £11,000! Two officers of the Intelligence Division were responsible for the whole of the colonial section. Another pair were supposed to look after France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and all America from Texas to Cape Horn. Nevertheless, in spite of the small means at its disposal, the Intelligence Division had before the war formed a fairly adequate estimate of the military resources of the two Republics,† had surveyed the principal lines along which it was expected that operations would take place, and prepared schemes for the

* "The government of the Army by the War Office is mainly carried on by a vast system of minute regulations which tend to destroy the responsibility of General Officers, and to suppress individuality and initiative in all ranks. . . . The mass of unnecessary routine work within the War Office is so great as to absorb the energies of the staff, which is generally overworked. . . . Matters of policy are, therefore, not adequately considered. The necessary sense of proportion is lost, and the training and preparation of the Army must inevitably suffer."

"If decentralisation were thoroughly carried out . . . the time of the Headquarter Staff would no longer be, as now, entirely devoted to the details of administration. Small matters of routine would disappear, and, as a result, fewer officers would be employed upon the administration of the Army, setting free the remainder for the consideration of those important questions, regarding preparation for war, which form so large a feature in the work of the General Staff of foreign armies."—*Report of* 1901 *Committee.*

† See "Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa," compiled in Section B, Intelligence Division, War Office. Revised June 1899.

defence of the most important positions in Cape Colony, such as De Aar, Naauwpoort, Stormberg, etc. Far worse than the starved condition of the Intelligence Division was its lack of authority. It was a mere information bureau with absolutely no control over military policy. Its investigations were not directed with the sense of responsibility that belongs to those who inquire in order to act upon their own information, nor had it the power to insist upon the taking of those measures of the necessity of which its special knowledge convinced it.

The Army an institution, not a fighting machine.

But the starving of the Intelligence Division, and the absence of a supreme department which should be at once the brains and the will of the military organism, are only typical of the whole Army system from top to bottom. Nowhere was there any definite preparation for war, nowhere any clear conception that war was the one end and object for which armies exist. In their place reigned a continuous bustling activity about the details of the daily life of the Army, and a hazy confidence that British good fortune and British courage would always come successfully out of any war that the inscrutable mysteries of foreign policy might bring about. The Army was regarded, less as an instrument of war to be kept ever ready for use, than as a state-established institution to be maintained and perpetuated for its own sake. Regarded as an institution or society the British Army of 1899 was undoubtedly a success. The numbers on its rolls were large, the uniforms of the members through all the ranks of the military hierarchy most distinctive, their traditional ceremonies, known as parades, inspections, guards, elaborate and pleasing to the eye, the regulations to which they submitted, infinitely complex. As a fighting machine it was largely a sham. The number of full-grown efficient soldiers was small, the military training of all ranks inadequate, and the whole organised on no definitely thought out principle of Imperial defence, and prepared for no eventualities.

Financial organisation of the Army. Its wastefulness.

The financial organisation of the whole was inconceivably cumbrous and wasteful. The false economy of maintaining a whole army of inefficients in order to avoid paying an

adequate pay to efficients has been exposed already. It was equally false economy to spend some twenty millions and more a year on the Army and to dole out one six-hundreth part of it for military intelligence—to keep an army at all and not provide it with proper facilities for training. These are matters of military policy, but the actual finance was equally bad. The whole system of detailed parliamentary votes and Treasury control, with its cumbrous safeguards, dating back to the days when kings might use armies for the suppression of public liberties or misappropriate the funds for their mistresses, was an anachronism. Economy can only result from financial responsibility and control. The Army had no real control over its own budget. A necessary increase on one item was often almost impossible to exact from the Treasury, while on the other hand there was little inducement to economize where reductions might have been possible. The returning of unexpended balances to the Treasury by April 1 was a deliberate incitement to waste. The wastefulness at the head went through all the members. The preparation of estimates, the contract system, the pay system, clothing system, store system, were all carried out on antiquated and wasteful lines. The internal administration of the districts reproduced all the vices of the War Office in miniature. There was nothing to encourage a cutting down of unnecessary expenditure, while the smallest necessary outlay could only be sanctioned after a protracted epistolary struggle with Pall Mall. The leading strings system was as opposed to economy as it was to sound military training. Economy, in consequence, there was none in the Army, though cheeseparing in plenty. Worst waste of all, perhaps, was the gigantic waste of time due to antiquated red-tape methods, formalisms, and ceremonies which swallowed up the greater part of the soldier's life, and left no time for the real business of war. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the whole Army spent the greater part of its existence in checking its own accounts. When one thinks, to give but a few instances, that all payments were by the day, and generally divided into a number of different headings for pay and allowances, all calculations of foodstuffs by the ration, involving endless sums

in simple multiplication and addition, that every article of clothing was revalued again and again, that every item of daily accounts was checked and re-checked and copied out in duplicate and triplicate, that the accounts of a company made out in triplicate covered over four hundred pages a month, the really surprising thing is that any time at all was left for military training. It was accountancy run mad. The object of it all was to prevent defalcations. The object was attained, but at a ruinous cost. The Turkish system—by which the general commanding a district receives a lump sum for pay from which he embezzles his quotient before passing it on to the regimental officers, who repeat the process—has its drawbacks, but at any rate it interferes less directly with the training of officers and men.

Criticism mainly applicable to Home Army.

It may be said that this criticism of the British Army is too sweeping, and is controverted by the admission previously made that no European Power could have brought so difficult a military enterprise to a successful issue and that no other European army would have adapted itself so readily to the novel conditions of warfare in South Africa. But it has already been pointed out that the purposes for which European armies exist are so entirely different from ours that such a comparison has little value. Nor would it be difficult to show that antiquated theories of tactics, unintelligent methods of training, love of useless display, and red-tape formalism, are not confined to the British Army, but are predominant even in the foremost armies of Europe, though it is doubtful if any of them could show quite as unbusiness-like and extravagant an organisation and administration as ours. Again, it is no vindication of our Army system that the opportunities for experience afforded by service in a world-wide empire acted as a corrective to the system. With those opportunities the British Army ought to be, for its size, the best army in the world. It is not much consolation to know that, owing to those opportunities, it was not so bad as its home training was calculated to make it. It was to the Army system as a whole, and to the training and organisation of the Home Army, that the criticism chiefly applied. Wherever the British officer could

shake himself free from the paralysing trammels of the system, he struck out on original and practical lines. The army in India was efficiently organised and well-trained, though even there the British regiments brought much of their red tape with them. The Egyptian Army could challenge comparison with any other for economical and business-like administration., The military organisation of the different self-governing colonies was elementary, but the training of their forces, such as it was, was mainly practical.

The war the Empire's war rather than the Home Army's.

It is to these elements and to the national spirit of the mother country and of the colonies quite as much as to the Regular Army system that the British Empire owes such measure of success as it has had in this war. At the outbreak of war a feeling undoubtedly prevailed among soldiers in England that the South African War was to be the Home Army's war, and that Pall Mall and Aldershot were to show the world how a great expedition should be managed. In some respects, the War Office undoubtedly performed a feat of which it had no reason to be ashamed. The original expeditionary force was well equipped, and the heavy strain of maintaining efficient in the field for two years an army far larger than any British policy had ever contemplated, was met by the War Office officials in a fashion that disarmed their severest critics. To those who did that work, to the Commander-in-Chief, to Sir Evelyn Wood, the Adjutant-General, to Sir C. Mansfield Clarke, the Quartermaster-General, and to Sir H. Brackenbury, the Director-General of Ordnance, every praise is due. But in the field the "army corps" which went out with so much circumstance failed completely, and though bad strategy, ill fortune, and insufficient numbers account for much they were not the only, or even the chief, reasons of its failure. It was the whole training, composition, and organisation of the force that were defective, and it was not till the army in South Africa was remodelled by the practical sense of its officers, its composition altered by the wholesale incorporation in it of colonial, South African, and other improvised volunteer forces, and the whole trained anew in the school of experience, that it became a more or less adequate instrument for overcoming

the stubborn resistance of the Boers. The conquest of South Africa has been the work of the British Empire and of the British officers and men on the spot. It has not been the work of the War Office or of the Army system.

The nation's responsibility.

The chiefs of the Army were no doubt themselves largely to blame for the condition of affairs at the outbreak of war. Many, and by no means the least serious, defects of the Army system might have been remedied without any recourse to the Government of the day; other reforms could have been carried through if the military advisers of the Government had made up their minds as to what were the changes most needed, and had shown any determination in pressing them. Nevertheless, the real responsibility must rest with the nation and with its rulers. It was in their hands that the supreme control of the Army lay; it was their interests that were safeguarded by military efficiency, and their policy to which the organisation of the Army was subordinated. It was for them to know for what purpose they required an army, and to insist that the Army should be efficient to fulfil that purpose. The subordination of the Army to the civil power is a feature of the British Constitution on which Englishmen have always prided themselves. But it involves a responsibility which Englishmen have been too apt to forget. An independent army may be made efficient by the exertions of one or two able and ambitious men at its head, in spite of public indifference. The sword with which Prussia laid low Austria and France, and carved out modern Germany, was forged by Moltke and his coadjutors in face of the most determined opposition from the representatives of the Prussian people. But an army which is absolutely subordinate to the civil power, which is a mere instrument of the national will, can only be efficient if the nation is determined to insist upon efficiency. It is absurd to blame the Army for not having the military interests of the nation at heart if the nation itself is indifferent to those interests. That indifference was deep rooted, and even the fear of invasion, which had largely contributed to the Cardwellian reforms, had but a transient influence.

The reform of the Army from within was impossible

without the active and intelligent co-operation of the national will as expressed in the Government. And that co-operation was lacking. Neither the Government nor the House of Commons treated the question of Army reform seriously. Every year the Secretary of State reviewed the position of the Army in Parliament, and paraded imposing lists of figures whose chief object was to delude the taxpayer into the belief that he was really getting a large and well-trained Army for the money he paid so freely. The details of the Army Estimates were discussed in an almost empty House. The complaints of civilian critics were met by bland official assurances that everything was for the best, the demands of the military heads of the Army were dismissed as politically inconvenient. For years public-spirited critics had denounced the failings of our military system. But they had not by the summer of 1899 succeeded in creating a national demand for military efficiency to compare with that demand for naval preparedness to which politicians had yielded a decade before. In a vague way, it is true, politicians were beginning to realize the military unpreparedness of the Empire. The military budget which in 1888 had been only £16,000,000, when Lord Randolph Churchill resigned sooner than add another penny to it, had been rising steadily since then, and had reached £20,617,210 for the year 1899–1900. But readiness to spend by itself was not sufficient. The things far more essential than money, proper facilities for manœuvres, for field training, for rifle ranges, a reorganisation which should give officers men enough to train, and the men time to be trained in, everything, in fact, that could convert the Army from a crowd of men in uniforms into a real instrument of war, was neglected. A densely populated country like England certainly presents difficulties in the way of training. But they are overcome elsewhere. The real obstacle lay in the universal unwillingness to realise that preparation for war is a serious national duty.

Absence of interest in Army Reform. Readiness to spend money, but not to secure efficiency.

To the lethargic indifference of the Government and the nation the South African War has given a severe shock. Whether that shock will have really fruitful results is a question that only the event can answer. Many important

The lessons of the South African War.

and beneficial changes are already being made in our organisation and our tactics as a direct result of the war. But it cannot be said that, as yet, there are any indications of that complete remodelling of our whole system which alone can provide the British Empire with a military organisation adapted to the needs of British policy, suited to the character and the free political institutions of the British nations, and within the limits of expenditure which the Empire can provide without sacrifice of that material and moral well-being of its inhabitants which is the justification of its existence. Such a remodelling means very much more than patching up the existing system with pieces of the old Prussian cloth left unused by the Cardwellians or modifying our tactics by a few "tips" found useful on the veld. Both these devices are no doubt useful, but a "new model" can only be created by a new spirit. In a later volume it may be possible to discuss more fully the lessons to be drawn from the South African War, in their application to the reorganisation of the British Army. For the present purpose it is enough to say that the war ought to have taught us that policy and military preparation must go hand-in-hand and that military unpreparedness can cost more in a year than the most cheeseparing economy can save in a generation. The successes of the Boers should have encouraged us to think for ourselves and try to devise a military system of our own that shall forestall the lessons of the future rather than strive merely to copy other systems which may have gained success in the past. What that system should be is one of the chief problems before British statesmen. This much is sure: it must be based on clear principles of Imperial defence. It must be complementary to the Navy and not a mere expensive and unnecessary supplement to it. In other words, it must be organised to do those things which the Navy cannot do, and not to attempt to do those things which the Navy can do better and more economically. It must aim at the most perfect degree of organisation and at the same time at the highest development of individual skill and individual initiative. Every member of the new Army from the Head-

quarter Staff down to the privates in the ranks must be a trained expert in his own branch of the military art. There must be no room in it for stupid generals, for uneducated officers, for soldiers who cannot shoot straight or find their way about. Efficiency and not numbers must be the one standard of military preparedness. The new system must be free from all shams—from the sham of large paper armies composed of inefficients, the sham of an army with insufficient manœuvre-grounds and insufficient rifle practice, the sham of gold lace, pipe-clay, and kindred fripperies, the sham of ceremonial inspections and parades. If reorganisation is based on these lines there is no reason why the British Army, with the splendid raw material to be found in England and in the Colonies, and with the great opportunities for training available within the wide bounds of the Empire, should not, in spite of comparatively small numbers, become the most efficient and formidable instrument of war that the world has yet known.

CHAPTER II

THE BOER MILITARY SYSTEM

The Boers not untrained civilians, but a fighting people.

VERY different from the military system we have just described was the system against which it was brought to the test of the South African War. So different, indeed, was it, and so little known, that very few recognised it as a military system at all, or saw in the Boers anything more than a crowd of untrained peasants armed with rifles, able, perhaps, by virtue of accurate shooting and knowledge of the country to inflict loss on a small detachment, but quite incapable of offering organised resistance to a British Army corps. Since the war the contempt felt for the military prowess of the Boers has been replaced, in the minds of many critics, by an exaggerated belief in the military value of the untrained civilian. In both cases the error is due to the same misconception of the character of the Boer forces. The Boer Army was not a mere levy of patriotic civilians. To describe it as such is neither just to the enemy whom we have overcome nor to the gallant army that has carried on so long and arduous a struggle for supremacy, and tends to suggest theories about the art of war which might have the most dangerous consequences. The fact is that the Boers were not a people of civilians at all, like the ordinary population of European countries, but a fighting race with a fighting history. They possessed a military system which, even if incompletely organised in many respects, was yet highly developed in others, and presented features which well deserve the most careful study.

For the origin of the Boer military system we must go back a century and a half, to the period when the ancestors

of the Boers first began to occupy the great tableland that forms the interior of South Africa.

Origins of the Boer military system. The South African tableland.

As the cradle of the Boer nationality, the stage on which all its history has been played, the school in which it learnt its own peculiar lessons in the art of war, and the great battlefield on which it has turned those lessons to such good account, the South African tableland deserves more than a passing mention. A glance at any map indicating differences of altitude will show that this tableland occupies practically the whole of South Africa. A general subsidence of 2000 feet, such as would leave nothing of the United Kingdom above the sea except a few scattered clusters of islets, would in South Africa only submerge the narrowest strip of coast-line, and scarcely affect either the shape or the area of the great sub-continent. From Walfisch Bay to Lorenzo Marques the interior of South Africa is everywhere shut off from the coast by lofty mountains, mountains which are, in reality, but the scarps of the great plateau beyond. Within this plateau rises a yet higher central tableland over 4000 feet above sea level, mightily bastioned to south and east by great mountain ranges, Nieuwveld, Sneeuwveld, Stormberg, Drakensberg—the latter with peaks rising above 10,000 feet—and sinking away to the north and west in a succession of terraces. It is this central plateau, which embraces Northern Cape Colony, Basutoland, the Orange River Colony, Northern Natal, and the greater part of the Transvaal, with a greatest length from Sutherland in the south-west to Lydenburg in the north-east of nearly 850 miles, and a width from Pietermaritzburg to Kimberley of over 300 miles, that has been the main theatre of the war.

Sameness of South African scenery. Geological formation.

In its physical features the whole vast tableland presents a curious sameness. From the Hex River Pass to within a few miles of the Zambesi, the South African landscape is an endless variation on one or two simple themes. The stranger's eye looks round in vain for the varied alternation of hill and valley, of woodland and moor, of cultivated land and pasture which form the elements of scenery in Europe. The monotony is partly due to the geological conformation of the country. The whole great plateau is made up of a

series of horizontal layers of rock. The rains of ages have washed away layer after layer in broad terraces from the highest levels of the high plateau down to the coast. But they have not done their work with absolute evenness. In every layer there are patches of harder rock which have resisted erosion and have been left as eminences standing up out of the surrounding plain. These eminences are of every size and shape: plateaux as big as an English county; great table-topped mountains, girt by walls or *krantzes* of sheer cliff rising above the lower slope of detritus, to be ascended only by the gullies or *kloofs* which carry off the rain-water from their tops; *kopjes* five, fifty or five hundred feet in height, carpeted with rich grass, or shaggy with boulders like a Swiss moraine. In some regions, as in the great plains of the Orange River Colony and Griqualand, they are sparsely scattered, steep islands of hazy blue swimming on the horizon of the boundless veld. Elsewhere they are more frequent, and the traveller seems to be girt in by an amphitheatre of close-set hills which, as he approaches, forever recede and stand wide apart. Or again, the hills become lofty mountains, and the level veld between shrinks down to a narrow *nek* or *poort*. But high or low, crowded together in a mountain range, or scattered over the vast plains, the hills of the South African plateau all conform to the same type, all reproduce in miniature the configuration of the continent on which they stand.

The rivers. Monotony of the vegetation.

The rivers add little to the landscape. For the most part they flow at the bottom of deep cuttings which they have scoured out for themselves in flood time, and are invisible till one actually reaches their banks. In drought all but the largest are reduced to mere chains of shallow pools. But a few hours' downpour of rain may convert the smallest trickle into a great swollen river twenty feet deep, and fill all the *sloots* or *dongas*, the deep ditches which everywhere furrow the surface of the veld, with turbid torrents hurrying away seawards the precious moisture that might, if retained, have helped to fertilise the soil. Nor is there any great variety of vegetation to modify the ever recurring sameness of veld and kopje. North of a line from Pretoria

to Mafeking there is a broad region under 4000 feet above sea level, the so-called bushveld, which is covered with a straggling forest, mainly of stunted mimosas and other thorny bushes. Tracts of similar vegetation occur in Natal and Bechuanaland. In Rhodesia even the higher land is freely dotted with trees. But the rest of the South African tableland is almost treeless, except for the band of willows and mimosas along the rivers and watercourses. In the eastern half of the plateau, where there is a good rainfall, hill and plain alike are covered with rich grass. Westwards towards the Kalahari desert the grass grows thinner and poorer, while in the great barren region known as the Karroo, which extends over so large a portion of Cape Colony, its place is taken by a herbage of scanty shrubs.

The climate. Clearness of the atmosphere.

The climate of all this elevated region is one of the most delightful in the world. The heat of summer is mitigated by frequent heavy rains, and the nights are cool. Winter presents a constant succession of bright sunny days and dry frosty nights. One of the most striking features of the South African veld is the marvellous clearness of the atmosphere, which makes it possible to detect the very smallest object miles away, and, in the absence of all distinguishing points, such as trees or fields, to guide the eye, renders all judgment of distances difficult for a stranger. This clearness of the South African atmosphere and the absence of almost all cover except such as is afforded by the shape of the ground itself played a large part in the tactical development of the Boer system and have been among the most characteristic features of the present war.

The early settlers on the High Veld.

It was not till towards the middle of the eighteenth century that the more adventurous spirits among the Dutch colonists began to make their way in any numbers through the passes up on to the southern portion of the great plateau. For the next thirty or forty years big game hunters, robber bands who lived by plundering the natives of their cattle, outlaws who had taken part in the abortive insurrection against the Dutch East India Company's Government in 1739, farmers' sons who preferred the roving life of the veld to the vineyards and orchards of Stellenbosch or the Paarl,

all roamed about or squatted here and there over the region south of the Orange River and west of the Great Fish River. In 1786 an attempt was made to extend the authority of the Government over these half nomad settlers by the creation of a seat of magistracy at Graaff-Reinet. But the squatters were a turbulent folk and brooked little interference or restraint. They expelled their landdrost in 1795, and remained till the final British occupation a practically independent republican community. The political differences between the British authorities and the Dutch colonists have already been dealt with in the first volume, though perhaps hardly enough stress was laid on the warlike and arrogant spirit and the impatience of all authority which characterised the men with whom the Government had to deal. For the present purpose it is more important to discuss those conditions of the life of these early settlers on the veld under which the Boer military system first acquired its distinct features.

Boers and savages. The commando system.

The country north of the Orange River was, at the time when the European settlers entered it, sparsely inhabited by Hottentot and Bushman tribes. These the settlers dispossessed. The more civilised Hottentots were reduced to servitude and guarded the herds and flocks which had once been their own property; the Bushmen were gradually exterminated as noxious vermin. The process was not a peaceful one, and for a generation or more every Boer farmer held his land and acquired cattle and slaves in continual warfare with the aboriginal inhabitants. It was an unequal conflict. The spear of the Hottentot, the poisoned arrow of the Bushman, were no match for the long flint-lock of the colonist. In a densely grown country the savage's cunning in ambush might have availed against the superior weapons of the white man. But on the bare South African veld the chances were all in the white man's favour. Moreover, the Boer was mounted and could always escape if the numbers of the enemy threatened to surround him, while the savage once detected in the open could be ridden down and shot with ease. It was only this enormous superiority that made it possible for a handful of Boers to live thinly scattered over a vast country

inhabited by savages with whom they were constantly at war. In ordinary times the men of one farmstead sufficed to shoot game for the household, to destroy noxious wild beasts and to keep off marauding natives. But if either wild beasts or natives were too numerous or too enterprising, the farmers of a district would assemble together and go out on "commando" against them, staying out on the veld for weeks together till they had thoroughly cleared the countryside.

Essential features of Boer system already developed. Comparison of Boer with mediæval knight.

Military methods are always closely bound up with the social and economic conditions of the society in which they develop. In the conditions of the life of these early squatters can be traced the origins of all the more distinguishing features of the Boer fighting system. The Boer farmer living miles from his fellow men had always to be prepared for single-handed encounters on the veld, or for the defence of his homestead against marauding bands. He naturally developed that mode of fighting which gave the greatest power and freedom of action to the individual. In masses, the foot-soldier has many advantages over the cavalryman, and hitherto all the great organised armies of history have been mainly composed of infantry. But where the fighting is between individuals or small parties, the advantage is all on the side of the horseman. The Boer mounted rifleman was as directly the product of his position, living alone among an alien population badly armed, unmounted and unorganised, as the mounted man in armour was the product of the somewhat similar social conditions which prevailed in Europe in the early middle ages. And with the Boer farmer as with the mediæval knight all depended on his personal skill and the training of his horse. If he was a careful scout and an unerring shot, if he could trust his pony to stand steady till the last moment at which it was safe to stay on firing, he could afford to despise almost any numerical odds against him. As in the middle ages, the military unit was the single horseman. The commando, large or small, was but an aggregate of these units, each of which acted independently in battle, though usually in accordance with some general plan suggested by an elected leader.

Undivided supremacy of the firearm.

Another feature which already at that date distinguished the Boer fighting method from any other was the exclusive reliance on one weapon and one style of fighting. The military system common to all the armies of modern Europe has been developed by a continuous series of small modifications from the military system of the middle ages. It is dominated throughout by traditions that go back to days when firearms were yet undiscovered or very imperfect. Even in this age of magazine rifles European soldiers have never wholly shaken themselves free from the notion that the firearm is only an adjunct, a mere means to the real decisive end of battle, which they still count to be the hand-to-hand struggle between men armed with the cold steel. The Boer was fettered by no mediæval prejudices. He wanted no better weapon than a good musket, and no other adjunct to it than plenty of cartridges. He had no inherited desire to close in hand-to-hand struggle with his enemy, or in fact to get any nearer to him than was necessary to get a fair shot. There was no question with him of using his fire as a means to cover his attack. His fire was his attack, and his one concern was to develop to the utmost the efficiency of that fire. The absolute undivided supremacy of the firearm has been from the first the foundation of the whole Boer system.

Absence of romance. Warfare and hunting.

Nor was the idea of fighting bound up in the Boer's mind with those traditions of chivalry and romance, of patriotism and self-sacrifice, that inspire the European soldier. He went out in a businesslike way to kill men, as he would to kill dangerous wild beasts, and he saw no more glory in dying at an enemy's hand than in being eaten by a lion. With the Boers hunting and warfare were separated by no very strict line of demarcation. The same weapons were used for each, and the methods suited to the one were largely suited to the other. The same skill in approaching his quarry unobserved, the same patience in waiting for its approach across the open veld, the same deadly accuracy once the quarry was in range, the same readiness to leap into the saddle for pursuit or flight were required whether that quarry was a springbuck, a lion, or a man. The open order formation and the enveloping tactics characteristic of the Boers served equally well to

PETRUS JACOBUS JOUBERT,
COMMANDANT-GENERAL AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC,
1881-1900.
Photo by C. F. Robertson.

surround a herd of game, to corral and destroy a tribe of Bushmen, or to patrol a border against the incursions of raiders from native territories beyond.

Boers and Kaffirs.

The Boers were soon to meet a more formidable enemy than any they had yet encountered. The Kaffir tribes which inhabited the eastern portion of South Africa stood on a much higher level of civilisation than the Hottentots. They were not only herdsmen but agriculturists, and in consequence their numbers were much larger and more concentrated. They were better armed, of magnificent physique and endurance, and imbued with a warlike spirit and a reckless courage that was entirely lacking among the feebler natives of the west. For some generations their increasing numbers had been steadily pushing westward, dispossessing or absorbing the original inhabitants, and by the middle of the eighteenth century they occupied all the lands east of the Great Fish River. It was here the Boers found them established as a barrier to all further expansion eastwards. Between two races, each possessed by an insatiable land hunger, each fierce and unscrupulous, it was not easy to keep the peace. The Kaffir lifted the Boer's cattle, and the Boer retorted by raiding the Kaffir's kraal. A constant guerilla warfare went on along the border, in spite of all the efforts of the authorities at the Cape to check it. As long as matters were confined to this desultory fighting the frontier farmers held their own without difficulty. But it became a much more serious matter when the Kaffirs came out in force. To repel their inroads it was necessary to call up on commando the whole farmer population of the countryside. Even so, the Boers were by no means a match for the superior numbers and the aggressive energy of their opponents.

Early Kaffir wars, 1789–1835.

In 1789 and 1793 large commandos were assembled to expel the Kaffirs from the lands they had seized west of the Fish River, but without success. In 1799 the Kaffirs overran the whole district of Graaff-Reinet, routing the burgher forces and driving all before them, and even after their repulse on the Cayman's River by the Swellendam commando, stiffened by a small force of British troops, they remained in possession

of the Zuurveld, the rich grazing country east of the Sunday's river. They were not expelled till 1811, when a large force of British regulars and burghers under Colonel Graham drove them across the Fish River. The Boers, however, felt no excessive gratitude towards the government by whose help they had recovered their lands, and within four years the repatriated farmers of the Zuurveld were in open rebellion, calling in the help of the Kaffirs and besieging the British frontier posts on the Fish River.* The ease with which the rebellion of 1815 was stamped out shows that the Boers were not yet a match for regular troops, even for the drilled Hottentots of the Cape Regiment. The trouble on the Kaffir border meanwhile went on as before. In 1819 the Kaffirs under Makana swept the open country westwards to Algoa Bay, but were repulsed with heavy loss by the British garrison of Grahamstown. At the close of the war the Kaffirs were driven east of the Keis Kama, and the frontier strengthened by the importation of a large body of British settlers. In 1835, after a period of continuous border forays, the Amaxosas once more invaded the colony in force, and after a stubborn contest, were once more driven back by the united efforts of British soldiers and Boer and British frontiersmen, and the colony extended to the Kei. The unfortunate reversal of Sir B. D'Urban's frontier policy and the political causes of the Great Trek have already been discussed in the preceding volume.† From the military point of view the real motive of the Trek was the conviction in the minds of the colonists—who saw themselves, by the deliberate hostility of a pro-native Colonial Secretary, robbed of the fruits of their hard-earned victory, and exposed once more on an indefensible frontier to the attacks of a restless enemy—that they could fight the Kaffirs more successfully by themselves, even without the aid of British troops, if only they could escape from the mischievous interference of the British Government.

The Great Trek. Mosilikatse and Dingaan.

The Great Trek was not an emigration in the ordinary sense. It was more akin to those great military migrations which accompanied the downfall of the Roman Empire. The subjugation of the natives and the creation by conquest of

* See Vol. I. p. 29. † See Vol. I. pp. 30–35.

a vast independent republic, which should perpetuate, without interference, the social and political ideals of the Boer frontiersman, were the avowed objects of the expedition. No preparations were neglected. The sale of their farms provided money for an abundant supply of ammunition and even for a few cannon. Thus equipped and armed with the experience and courage won by two generations of border warfare the *voortrekkers* advanced boldly into the almost unknown regions across the Orange river. On the broad plains south of the Vaal they met with no resistance. Many of the tribes had been utterly wiped out by the murderous forays of the Zulus and Matabele,* and the scattered remnants of those that were left were in many cases glad to welcome the advent of a stronger and less barbarous power among them. The Matabele were the first enemies whom the Boers had to encounter. Several advanced parties of the emigrants were massacred in the Transvaal. Others only escaped by the heroism with which they defended the barricaded circle of their waggons. It was behind this primitive barrier that the Boers learnt that stubbornness of defence that distinguished them in many a subsequent engagement, and acquired that indifference to mere numerical superiority in their opponents which they have ever displayed. Even after allowing for all exaggerations the accounts of some of these defences cannot but fill one with amazement and wholehearted admiration for the splendid fortitude and skill with which forty or fifty men would withstand for hours the attack of thousands of highly drilled and desperate savages, almost without losing a man. Punitive expeditions were sent by the main body of the emigrants, and Mosilikatse's hordes were driven in headlong flight across the Limpopo. In Natal we find the same story of massacre and signal revenge. At Blood River on December 16, 1838, Dingaan's 10,000 Zulus attacked the Boer laager of less than 500 men under Pretorius and were utterly routed. Three thousand Zulus

* The Zulus and Matabele shared the military system which Chaka had created in imitation of British infantry, and their discipline and contempt of death made them perhaps the most formidable race of savage warriors that ever existed.

were left on the field while three Boers were slightly wounded. It was in these wars against Mosilikatse and Dingaan that the Boers first practised the device of galloping up to close range of the advancing regiments, pouring in a deadly volley and then galloping back to reload and repeat the operation. Against modern firearms the direct application of this device is almost impossible though it was on one or two occasions attempted by the Boers in the present war. But the spirit underlying it, the idea of keeping the enemy at arm's length and never allowing him to close, has been characteristic of Boer methods throughout.

Boers and British. Congella, Touwfontein, Boomplaats. Boer system not yet a match for Regulars.

The aggressive attack of the emigrants upon some of the Pondo tribes west of Natal led the British Government to occupy Port Natal in 1842 and resulted in the first armed conflict between the Boers and British troops.* The Boers, mustering on Congella heights, besieged Captain Smith in Port Natal. An attempt to surprise them by a night attack failed miserably. The attacking force was itself surprised by a withering volley and broken up, leaving behind 50 out of 138 men and two guns. On the other hand the Boers proved quite unable to reduce the little garrison, which held out most heroically till relieved. This fighting round Durban was in many ways typical of much that was destined to happen in the future. The next collision between Boers and British occurred in May, 1845. The Boers had been engaged in a desultory war with the Griquas,† and as they refused to desist Colonel Richardson with a mixed force of cavalry, infantry, and mounted Griquas, marched from Philippolis against the Boer camp at Touwfontein. The Boers were skilfully employed by the Griquas in front while the British cavalry worked round their rear. Against such tactics on the part of a mobile force, the Boers, then as sixty years later, showed the weak points of their system, and dispersed after making a very half-hearted resistance. In

* See Vol. I. pp. 38–42.

† The Griquas were a bastard race of Boers and Hottentots who on the wide plains north of the Orange River, in the present Griqualand West and Western Orange River Colony, had developed a system of fighting almost identical with that of the Boers, and had shortly before the Trek beaten back a Matabele invasion with heavy loss.

1848 the Republican party under A. W. Pretorius rose against the proclamation of the Orange River sovereignty. On July 17 a Boer force a thousand strong appeared before Bloemfontein and compelled its surrender. Sir Harry Smith marched up in hot haste to suppress the rising. At Boomplaats, on the road to Bloemfontein, he came upon the Boers under Pretorius some 800 strong occupying a front of over a mile on "a succession of ridges on either side of a stream covered with large stones and brush." The British force consisted of 800 regulars drawn from the Rifle Brigade, the 45th and 91st regiments, and from the Cape Mounted Rifles, in those days a Hottentot corps under European officers, of some 250 Griquas and some Loyalist farmers. The troops were surprised by the first volley from the Boers, who had been lying hid behind the boulders, but stormed the crest with great gallantry, only to find that the Boers had retreated to a ridge behind. Again and again at one ridge after another the farmers stood up to the attacking infantry before they finally dispersed leaving 49 dead on the field.* The British lost 22 killed and about 40 wounded. Sir Harry Smith, who had grown old fighting in the Peninsula, on the Kaffir frontier and in India, described Boomplaats as one of the most severe skirmishes he had ever witnessed. Of their fire he declared: "a more rapid, fierce and well-directed fire I have never seen maintained." All the leading characteristics of Boer fighting, the extended order, the carefully concealed position on a ridge with the horses kept behind, the fierce fire deliberately withheld till the last moment, the stubborn retreat from point to point, can be seen already fully developed. A contemporary print representing the battle gives an excellent picture of the Boers in their slouch hats firing from the shelter of some rocks at the advancing infantry, while their ponies stand grazing quietly behind them. It is a rearguard action and some of the Boers are shown already mounting to get away, while in the background a party of Boers are seen galloping off across the open. In courage and fighting capacity the Boers of that day were fully equal to their descendants, and

* These were the figures as reported by Sir Harry Smith. The Boers declared that they only lost nine killed and five wounded.

the vigorous counter attack made by the Boer right at one stage of the battle has not often been repeated in the present war. That they failed to check the frontal attack of British infantry was due to the short range and slow loading of the guns of that day. The Boer system, which relied on fire effect alone, however successful against savages, was not as yet capable of meeting well-disciplined troops in pitched battle. The interval of effective fire was too short to shake the *moral* or even exhaust the breath of attacking infantry. Sir Harry Smith's remark that the right way to engage the Boers is to press them so vigorously that they have no time to remount shows how different in that respect the conditions then were from what they have since become. Against cavalry charging in the open the Boers of that day would have been helpless. It was only the modern rifle that made it possible for the Boer tactical system to hold its own on the field of battle. In the open competition of European warfare such a system could only have been evolved slowly by very gradual modifications based on experience of the effects of modern firearms. In the peculiar circumstances of South Africa it was already fully developed and ingrained in a whole nation before the conditions under which it could be really effective had come into existence.

Native and civil wars, 1852–1876.

The Boers were not destined to face British troops again for over thirty years, and then under conditions more favourable to their methods of fighting. In the meanwhile, after the withdrawal of the British Government, the work of subjecting the natives prevented the military spirit dying out among them. The Free Staters fought almost incessantly from 1854 onwards with the Basutos, who had learnt the art of fighting on horseback, and proved themselves most redoubtable adversaries. It was not till 1868 that the Basutos were finally worsted by the whole forces of the Free State aided by volunteers from every part of South Africa. The Boers north of the Vaal were meanwhile engaged in crushing the various tribes that were beginning to recover from Mosilikatse's invasion. The Bakathla, Barolongs and Bakwena on their western border were continually striving to assert their independence, and

frequent expeditions were sent against them. It was in the war against Sechele in 1852 that Field-Cornets Paul Kruger and Piet Joubert first distinguished themselves. These wars were generally carried on with barbarous cruelty. In 1852 the Boers made war on the Bapedi in the mountainous country north-west of Lydenburg. A large force under their chief, Sekwati, were surrounded on a waterless mountain, and the investment continued till they all, men, women, and children, died of thirst. Two years later nearly 3000 of Makapan's tribe, who had taken refuge in one of the great caves in the mountains near Pietersburg, were similarly destroyed. From the military point of view, these two operations are very characteristic of Boer unwillingness to run the risk of an attack if the object could be attained equally well by other means, an unwillingness that on other occasions has stood greatly in the way of their success. For the next ten years, apart from wars with the natives, the Boers were largely engaged in fighting among themselves. These civil wars caused very little bloodshed. In face of an enemy who possessed firearms, and could shoot straight, each side was careful not to expose itself recklessly. Ammunition was too scarce and expensive to be rashly blazed away when it might be wanted for Kaffirs or game. Casualties accordingly were rare. Still, ridiculous as they were, these civil wars no doubt had their value as tactical exercises. When peace was finally made in 1864, Paul Kruger, who had taken a leading part in all the civil disturbances, was elected commandant-general of the united Republic. He had a hard task before him. During the civil wars the natives, many of whom now possessed firearms, had been steadily growing stronger, and encroaching upon the unorganised white farmers. From 1865 to 1868 Commandant Kruger waged a war with Magato's tribe in the north which ended in the expulsion of the Boers from a great part of the Zoutpansberg region. This war was followed by troubles on the western border. The weakness of the Boers was shown by their submitting the dispute to British arbitration, thus tacitly abandoning their old claim to the sovereignty of all the country up to Lake Ngami. The crowning failure was

the war against Sikukuni, son of the chief Sekwati, whose terrible end was described above. A large commando was called out, but there was no proper commissariat, no supply of ammunition, no discipline. The first serious encounter was followed by a general panic-stricken flight of the burghers, whom no inducement could keep in the field. The attempt to raise a mercenary force of adventurers only wrecked the impoverished finances of the Republic.*

Decline of Boer reputation. Mistaken conclusions.

Never had the military reputation of the Boers stood so low in their own eyes, as well as those of all South Africa, as at the time of the annexation of 1877. Dr. Theal, writing in 1876, declared that the Boer commando system had broken down for ever, and was no match for any enemy armed with guns. What was not sufficiently understood at the time was that the causes of Boer defeats were political and economic, rather than purely military. The Boers had lapsed into hopeless anarchy; no one took sufficient interest in the State either to pay taxes to it or to risk his life on its behalf. The government in consequence was bankrupt and could not afford to equip its commandos properly; the commandos were without cohesion, and dispersed as soon as they saw there was any danger. The whole political fabric was rotten, and in danger of being swallowed piecemeal by the Kaffirs. Nevertheless the individual Boer, if he chose to fight, remained as good a fighting man as ever. In one respect he had even improved, for he was now much better armed. Game was still plentiful in the country, and many of the farmers were marvellous shots. The Westley-Richards sporting rifle, with which most of the Boers were now provided, was an infinitely superior weapon to the old elephant gun, and had enormously enhanced the value of Boer tactics, though no one yet realised the fact.

The annexation. Cause of the revolt.

British rule restored the finances of the state. British blood and money freely spent crushed the threatening danger from the Zulus and reduced Sikukuni to submission. The Boer farmers began to recover prosperity, and with prosperity their spirits rose again. Their old divisions disappeared before a common opposition to the new government—an opposition

* See Vol. I. pp. 51 *sqq.*

which it took Kruger and the independence party three years to work up to the pitch of action. The Boers meanwhile had time to study British troops in camp and in action and formed no very high estimate of their fighting powers. Isandhlwana created an enormous sensation in South Africa. Such a disaster could never have befallen a Boer force, and from the Boer point of view to be wiped out by Kaffirs was a far worse disgrace to troops than merely to run away. The Boers revolted not because they were oppressed, but because they were confident that they could drive the troops out of the country. Even so it is probable that an initial success on the part of the British would have led to an immediate collapse of the rising and the flight of its leaders. The first British reverses put life into the movement, rallied the waverers, and gave that self-confidence and moral cohesion which with irregulars is the only substitute for discipline.

The war of 1881. Complete success of Boer methods

The war of 1881 proved how enormously Boer fighting methods had gained by the introduction of a rifle which could carry five or six hundred yards with accuracy. At Bronkhorst Spruit Colonel Anstruther's little force suffered a loss of 66 per cent. in less than ten minutes. The wounded had on an average five wounds per man. At Laing's Nek the frontal attack against the intrenchments was carried out by our men with the utmost gallantry, but was repulsed with a loss of over 30 per cent. On the boulder-strewn Ingogo heights, the Boers showed their superiority as skirmishers, and the British force retired after losing over 45 per cent. Majuba was the culminating triumph of the Boer system. The skill with which 200 men scaled a great mountain held by more than twice their number of trained soldiers, and shot them down like a herd of panic-stricken deer, will always claim the admiration of all students of tactics. The chief features of the battle—the carelessness of the British in neglecting to explore the ground in front of their position; the massing of men at points that could never have been threatened; the useless sangars of loose stones that only served as a mark for fire; the hours of intermittent sniping, during which the Boers steadily worked their way up from gully to gully and boulder to boulder; their sudden appearance at unexpectedly close range,

and the rapid, murderous fire kept up on the crest line of the sangars; the wavering and confusion of the defenders, ever huddling in towards their centre; the final break-up and abandonment of all resistance—have been repeated, not once or twice only, in the present war. The British loss at Majuba, including prisoners, was over 50 per cent.; the Boers lost two men. The heaviness of the British casualties in 1881 was due partly to the excellence of the Boer shooting, which was probably better then than it has ever been since, and partly to the close formations and wretched shooting of the British. The unsuccessful sieges of the little British garrisons scattered over the country in many ways resembled the sieges of the present war, though the lack of artillery on the Boer side enabled garrisons of 50 or 60 men to hold out for the whole duration of the war.

The lessons of 1881 neglected by the British.

The lessons taught by the Boer successes, the power given by modern rifles to loose enveloping single line tactics, to skilful use of ground, and to mobility, made little impression on the British. A considerable improvement in musketry training followed during the next twenty years (and it is worth noting that one of the most zealous reformers of our musketry training, General Ian Hamilton, was among the wounded at Majuba); but apart from that little attempt was made to analyse the methods that had proved so astonishingly successful. It was considered sufficient to dismiss the actions of 1881 as skirmishes whose methods could never be applied to battles on a large scale. To the Boers their victories were something more than a mere confirmation of the rightness of their methods. They created a military tradition and inspired a high spirit and an unshaken self-confidence which, however fatal in their ultimate political results, helped to make them the formidable military power they became.

Military operations between 1881 and 1899.

The Boers were by no means altogether at peace during the years following the war. During the greater part of the year 1882, Boer freebooters were fighting the Bechuana chief Montsioa on the western border. From November, 1882, to July, 1883, the republican forces under Joubert carried on a campaign against the chiefs Mapoch and Mampoer in the country near Middelburg. A little later a band of Boers

under Lukas Meyer took part in the civil wars in Zululand and annexed the Vryheid region as their reward. In 1884 the continued aggressions of the Boers in Bechuanaland compelled the intervention of the British Government. Hostilities seemed at one time imminent, but President Kruger drew back before the demonstration of force made by Sir C. Warren's well-equipped and well-organised force. Minor native wars went on. Thus in 1886 the Boers fell upon the chief Massouw, who had been their ally in the Bechuanaland troubles, broke up his tribe and confiscated his lands. In 1894, Joubert with some 2000 men carried on a successful two months campaign in the Zoutpansberg against Malaboch. Eighteen months later came the Jameson Raid. The Raid is of military interest chiefly as showing the rapidity with which the Boers could mobilise. The actual stopping of the little band of raiders by two or three thousand Boers was no great feat, though the Boers showed their customary skill in enveloping tactics and in use of ground. Their shooting, however, was, by general admission, indifferent, a fact due in part to the decrease of game in the more settled parts of the Transvaal and in part to the moral effect of Maxim and magazine fire. In 1898 the last native chief who had attempted to assert his independence, Mpefu, successor of Magato, Kruger's old adversary of the sixties, was conquered without difficulty,* and retired into Rhodesia.

The policy of armament. Before the Raid.

We now enter upon the final stage of the military development of the Boers. The Boers had at all times, as the foregoing pages have shown, been a race of fighters, but the transformation of the Transvaal into a military state only took place during the last few years preceding the present war. The political causes of the Transvaal policy of armament have already been discussed in the first volume. It is sufficient here to summarise briefly the actual development of that policy.† The desirability of strengthening his armaments would seem to have first impressed itself upon Kruger during the course of 1893. He began to realise, firstly, that the

* *I.e.*, as far as the military operations went. The commandos were nearly starved owing to the breakdown of the commissariat arrangements.

† See also Vol. I. pp. 147–150 and 158.

Uitlanders could, in the long run, be only kept out of political rights by force, and, secondly, that force as well as diplomacy might have to play its part before he could get rid of the fetters of the Convention or secure free access to the coast. In the course of 1894, 13,000 Martini-Henry rifles were imported to re-arm the burghers, and Mr. Fitz-Patrick suggests that in that same year sums amounting to several hundred thousand pounds were secretly transferred to Europe for the purchase of armaments. In 1895 another 10,000 rifles were bought and some 12,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition accumulated in the fort at Pretoria. The construction of a fort to overawe Johannesburg and of another to defend Pretoria was decided on. The artillery, which consisted of about 18 field-pieces of various more or less antiquated patterns manned by a hundred artillerymen, was to be greatly enlarged, and negotiations were entered into with Krupp's, Creusot's, and other firms for the supply of field-pieces and siege artillery, while a number of European instructors were imported—chiefly from Germany. These preparations were hurried on more vigorously after the Drifts crisis, but very little had actually been done before the Raid.

After the Raid.

The next three and a half years were spent by the Government at Pretoria in the accumulation of armaments which, compared with the burgher population of the republic, cannot be described as otherwise than enormous. The exact sums spent it is difficult to determine, for a great part of the military expenditure was undoubtedly concealed under such items as public works, special payments, sundry services, etc. Under these three headings, together with that of "military expenditure," the Transvaal spent £2,007,372 in 1896 (as against £741,645 in 1895), £1,793,279 in 1897, and £1,334,344 in 1898, while £1,430,077 was down in the estimates for 1899. These figures—especially as they must include a certain proportion of non-military expenditure—do not seem very high when compared with the heavy military budgets of European powers. But it must be remembered that this expenditure represents only the net expenditure on materials of war, and that all the other items which bulk so largely elsewhere, pay, pensions, barracks, uniforms, remounts, trans-

port and food, were covered by the peculiar social and political circumstances of the Transvaal. The indirect economic loss to the community of maintaining the old burghers as an armed oligarchy practically exempt from taxation, and living upon the revenues drawn from the unarmed "helot" population, ought to be borne in mind in estimating the military expenditure of the Transvaal.

The accumulation of rifles and ammunition.

Besides the old Westley-Richards, there were already some 23,000 rifles in the Transvaal at the end of 1895. During the next three years at least 40,000 more were purchased, and at the outbreak of the war there must have been something between 60,000 and 80,000 rifles in the country.* The process of importing rifles was still going on busily when the war broke out, and early in 1899 an unsuccessful attempt was made to purchase 60,000 obsolete Werdl rifles from the Austrian government. In any case the Transvaal had accumulated more than enough rifles to arm the whole burgher population of the Transvaal twice over. These figures are only intelligible when it is remembered that the Transvaal regarded itself as an arsenal from which the whole Dutch-speaking population of South Africa was to be armed for the expulsion of the British power. The Mauser rifle, with which the bulk of the Transvaal forces were actually armed during the war, was an excellent

* The 'Military Notes' (June, 1899) gave the figures as 62,900, including 24,000 Mausers, 34,000 Martini-Henrys, and a balance of Lee-Metfords, Guedes, and Krag-Jörgensens. They also mention some 2000 Martini-Henry carbines. The compilers of the 'Notes' seem, curiously enough, to have been misled by some statements as to the Boer dislike of the new-fangled Mausers into the belief that the Boers had refused the Mausers, and were still mainly armed with Martini-Henrys. There is good reason for believing that the total number of Mausers considerably exceeded the 24,000 mentioned in the 'Military Notes.' Captain Holcroft, formerly of the State Artillery, in an article in the 'National Review' (February, 1900), estimated the total at 70,000 Mausers and Martinis, and 8000 Lee-Metfords. An estimate made by Field-Cornet B. Viljoen before the war gave the total number of Mausers in South Africa as 43,000, viz., 38,000 in the Transvaal, and 5000 in the Free State. Captain Holcroft states that the 23,000 Martini-Henrys which were bought in 1894 and 1895 were afterwards sent down to Cape Colony with one hundred rounds apiece, and distributed among the disloyal population, but it is very doubtful whether so large an arming of these expected allies ever took place.

weapon. As a rapid firer it was, by virtue of its clip-loading mechanism, much superior to the single-loading Lee-Metford, while its sighting was both finer and more exact. No less adequate than the supply of rifles was the supply of small arms ammunition. There was an ammunition factory in connexion with the dynamite monopoly, but practically all the ammunition came from Belgium, Germany, and England. The total amount accumulated by October, 1899, is difficult to estimate, but it may have been anything from seventy million rounds upwards.* The burghers of the Free State were before the war mainly armed with the Martini-Henry, though some Mausers were bought as early as 1896, and 3000 some months before the war. As most of the Free State burghers were armed with Mausers during the war the rest must have been supplied by the Transvaal. The normal stock of reserve ammunition kept at Bloemfontein was four million rounds, but this total was largely increased between May and October, 1899.

The Boer artillery.

The guns possessed by the Transvaal artillery in 1895 were few and antiquated. Another fifty guns or so were now purchased. These were of very various types, and do not seem to have been bought on any very definite principle. That the Boers have introduced into modern warfare two entirely new types of field artillery, the heavy long range gun and the small calibre automatic gun (better known under their nicknames of "Long Tom" and "pom-pom"), is highly creditable to the energy and adaptability of the officers and men of the State Artillery and of their

* The 'Military Notes' state that there were 23,000,000 rounds in the central magazine at Pretoria in June. This corresponds fairly well with the fifteen to twenty million rounds of Mauser and ten to twelve million Martini-Henry which Mr. Piet Grobler mentioned in a letter to President Steyn (dated May 9, 1899) as being then at General Joubert's disposal. But large supplies were imported after that date, including at least 25,000,000, and possibly 40,000,000, rounds of Mauser ammunition which the British Government weakly allowed to pass through Delagoa Bay in September. Besides the supplies at Pretoria there were large quantities in government magazines all over the country, while the amount accumulated in the houses of individual burghers by the hoarding instinct acquired in days when cartridges were the most precious of all commodities, was by no means inconsiderable. In all there may have been 70,000,000 to 100,000,000 rounds.

expert helpers. But it is very doubtful whether the effectiveness of these new weapons was clearly foreseen by those who were responsible for their purchase. It is far more probable that this was one of the cases where necessity proved the mother of invention. Against the overwhelming superiority in artillery of the British army, every machine that could fire off a projectile was impressed into the service of the field artillery. The chief credit the Transvaal government deserves in the matter is for its realisation of the value of having the latest weapons, and for its readiness to experiment with such entirely new arms as the automatic gun, a readiness which contrasts with the conservative attitude towards all inventions maintained by the British War Office. The list of the guns acquired by the Transvaal after the policy of armament was decided on is, approximately, as follows:—(1) Four 155-mm. (6-inch) Creusot fortress-guns, throwing a 94 lb. shell. These were the "Long Toms" which played so prominent a part in the war. There is good reason for believing that twelve more of these were ordered, but had not left Creusot before the outbreak of war. (2) Four 120-mm. (4·7-inch) Krupp howitzers. (3) Six 75-mm. Creusot q.-f. field-guns. (4) Eight 75-mm. Krupp q.-f. high-velocity field-guns. These were imported just before the outbreak of war. (5) Five 75-mm. Vickers-Maxim q.-f. mountain-guns of the type employed in the Egyptian army. (6) The two Maxim-Nordenfeldts taken with Dr. Jameson. (7) 22 or 23 37-mm. Vickers-Maxim automatic guns (pom-poms), firing a string of 1 lb. shells containing a small bursting charge. (8) 31 Maxims, partly ·303-inch and partly ·45-inch calibre. For all these guns large supplies of ammunition were imported at the time of their purchase, while during the war the supply was kept up by shells manufactured under the supervision of Messrs. Grunberg & Léon * at Begbie's factory

* These two engineers, both belonging to the Creusot Company, of whom the former had already been in the Transvaal in the interests of his firm since the middle of 1895, constituted themselves the advisers of the Transvaal Government on all artillery matters, and played a most important part in the organisation of the Boer artillery both before and after the outbreak of war. To their ability and energy the Boer artillery largely owed such limited success as it achieved.

in Johannesburg,* and with the help of the Netherlands Railway Company and the Dynamite Factory. The Free State had before the war brought its artillery up to a total strength of 14 75-mm. Krupps. These were of a somewhat older pattern than the Transvaal Krupps of the same calibre, and though very serviceable guns, were neither quick-firing nor high-velocity. They also used black powder, whereas most of the Transvaal artillery used smokeless powder. Besides these, the Free State had about a dozen antiquated guns of smaller calibre and a few Maxims. The total armament of the two Republics thus amounted to some 60 or 70 pieces of modern artillery, with another 30 pieces of varying degrees of obsoleteness.

The Pretoria forts.

The subject of armaments cannot be dismissed without a reference to the forts, of which four were constructed to command the approaches to Pretoria, and another was erected above Johannesburg with a view to shelling the town in case of an attempted Uitlander rising. As no attempt was eventually made to defend them, the large sums spent in their construction were absolutely wasted. No doubt jobbery played a considerable part in a scheme which involved a great deal of contracting. At the same time the Boers may have thought it quite possible that an expeditionary force of 20,000 or 30,000 men might succeed in forcing its way as far as Pretoria. In such a case the defences of Pretoria might have played an important part. To bring the British to a halt there, while the mobile commandos attacked their communications, might well have meant the complete failure of the campaign. In the actual event the question of defending Pretoria did not arise till the Boers had been weakened by eight months' fighting, and till the British had over 200,000 men in the field. Against such a force the whole Boer army could not have held Pretoria, and so the forts were promptly and wisely abandoned.

Joubert's opposition to Kruger's military policy.

The construction of the Pretoria forts was carried out against the advice of Commandant-General Joubert. The event proved his judgment to have been sound, but it must

* This factory was completely wrecked by an explosion at the end of April, 1900.

be remembered that the whole policy of armaments was carried out against Joubert's wishes. The cautious old leader of the Transvaal Progressives was as devoted to the independence of the Republic as any of his fellow-countrymen. But he profoundly distrusted the aggressive policy which dominated the governing clique, and he used his position as Commandant-General to check as far as possible the military schemes which would inevitably provoke a conflict with the Imperial Power. To every suggestion from Kruger that more artillery should be purchased, he would reply that he had enough, and would not know what to do with any more, while, almost up to the very ultimatum he refused to consider, as being premature, the details of any plan of operations. There can be little doubt that if the political circumstances of the Transvaal had allowed Kruger to dispense with Joubert altogether, and substitute some thoroughgoing adherent of the policy of force, the armaments of the Boers would have been even more complete, and that the dozen or more batteries of field artillery which are believed to have been hastily ordered just before the outbreak of war would have reached South Africa long before that date.

Transvaal armaments well known to British Intelligence Division.

There was very little secrecy about the Transvaal armaments during these years. The guns and ammunition were bought from well-known firms, some of them in this country, in the name of the South African Republic. They were shipped in the ordinary way and conveyed up to Pretoria in open trucks. Much nonsense was talked during the earlier stages of the war by the general public, and even by responsible politicians, who were surprised to find that the Boers were supplied with large quantities of the most modern weapons, about the secret methods by which the Boers had smuggled these armaments into their country, and about the criminal ignorance of the Government and the War Office. Such ignorance could only have been possible by the grossest failure to do their duty on the part of the British Agent at Pretoria, and of the officers of the Intelligence Division. So far from failing, both Sir W. Conyngham Greene and the various officers who from time to time visited the Transvaal on secret service, kept their respective departments fully

informed as to the progress of Boer armaments. The failure to estimate the real strength of the Boers was due, not to their negligence, but to the non-existence in the actual organisation of the British army of an authoritative thinking and calculating department, which might to some extent, at least, have foreseen the great increase of effectiveness given to Boer tactics by the magazine rifle and long range artillery.

Boer organisation. The burgher army.

As regards organisation, the Boer military system underwent but few changes in the century and a half that embraces the national life of the Boers. Its leading principles—extremely simple ones and most effective in a primitive state of society—were the duty of every male old enough to carry a gun to be always armed and equipped ready to come out and fight at a moment's notice when called upon, and the right of the community, in times of war, to requisition or "commandeer" all private property for military purposes. A Boer army, from first to last, was simply a levy of the burghers. In the so-called citizen armies of modern Europe, the citizen, when called upon to serve, loses his citizen rights for the time being, and becomes simply a subordinate member of a great permanent organisation, an organisation which in most cases was created by despotic power in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Boer remained as much a burgher in the field as at home. There was no division between the political and the military organisation of the state, no uniform to distinguish the soldier from the civilian. In war as in peace the burghers were a democratically organised body following leaders selected by themselves. To a large extent the same men were elected to fulfil both civil and military functions. The nearest parallel to a Boer army in this identity of military, social, and political structure is to be found in the feudal levy of the middle ages.

Organisation of the commando.

The real unit of the Boer forces was the individual burgher. Every burgher between the ages of sixteen and sixty was liable to be called out. There was, however, a division into age classes, by which, on the occasion of smaller wars, those between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four were first called out, then those between thirty-four and fifty, and only in the last resort those under eighteen or over fifty. Refusal to serve

was in both Republics punished by a fine of £37 10*s.* or three months imprisonment. The burghers of an electoral district formed a commando. Of these electoral districts there were twenty-two in the Transvaal and eighteen in the Free State. The commando was not a unit of any definite size, but varied from some 300 men in the less populous districts, to over 3000 in districts like Pretoria and Potchefstroom. At the head of it stood the commandant elected by the burghers of the district, and holding office for a period of five years in the Transvaal and three years in the Free State. Each district was divided into from two to five "wyks," or wards, The burghers of each ward were under a field-cornet elected by themselves for three years. The commandant was a purely military officer, and was at any rate supposed to be chosen for his military capacity, though as a rule political and social influence played the chief part in the elections. The field-cornet, on the other hand, was at the same time registration officer, justice of the peace, inspector of natives, and general representative of the government in his ward, and at his election military considerations played an even smaller part. The field-cornet kept the register of the burghers, and was responsible for seeing that they were properly mounted and equipped. He reported quarterly to the government on the state of his ward, the report going through the hands of the commandant. In the field he was helped by one or two assistant field-cornets and by several corporals elected by the burghers in camp. The field-cornets were responsible for providing ammunition, transport and supplies for their men, either by drawing upon the government or by commandeering. In the field a commissariat officer was usually appointed to every commando, while the actual supervision over the stores, the distribution of rations, forage, ammunition and clothing and the ordinary administration of camp life was left to the corporals. To the field-cornet also fell the chief work of mobilisation. On receipt of instructions from the government, each field-cornet appointed "commandeering officers" to proceed to the homes of the burghers and order them to assemble with horse, gun, ammunition and ten days' food. The field-cornet then addressed the burghers, stating

the cause why they had been called out on commando, and telling them when and where they were to concentrate in "laager" with the other wards of their commando.

Lack of central organisation.

In the Free State there was hardly any organisation higher than that of the commando. The President was the supreme military as well as civil head of the state. There was no headquarters staff or war department, though the Volksraad appointed annually a committee of five or more of its members who with the President inquired into the state of war material and the military preparedness of the country. At the outbreak of war a head-commandant for the whole or part of the forces could be elected by the commandants and field-cornets, who could also if dissatisfied with him discharge him, with the President's consent, and elect a successor. The military organisation of the Transvaal was somewhat more fully developed. At the head of the forces stood the commandant-general, elected for ten years by general ballot of all the burghers. The government also, in time of war, appointed assistant-generals and "vecht" or fighting generals to command forces composed of several commandos. There was no headquarters staff, but the Transvaal boasted a war department with a civilian secretary and ten clerks.

Military training of the Boers, official and unofficial.

The official training given to the burgher forces of the two Republics was very slight. Such as it was it was of an eminently practical character. "Wapenschouws," *i.e.* inspections combined with rifle meetings, were frequently held. Large quantities of ammunition were supplied free for target practice, and small sums, amounting in the Transvaal to £6000 a year, were distributed as prizes for rifle matches. Occasionally the burghers of neighbouring wards or districts would meet together for a sham fight, which would be conducted in a very informal but quite realistic fashion. But the real training of the burgher was not that which he received from the government, but that which he acquired in his everyday life and imbibed from the whole of his surroundings. Practically the whole Boer population lived in the open country, and even those who inhabited the so-called towns could always get into the open by five minutes walk. Keenness of sight, skill in judging distance, and many another

"Leading Men of General J. H. M. Kock's Force."

Photo by Boekhandel, Pretoria.

quality that the town bred recruit acquires painfully if at all, were to them part of their nature. Big game was no longer so plentiful as in the old days, and the great hunting parties after lion, elephant, and rhinoceros, in which the men of Paul Kruger's generation were trained, were in 1899 only a memory. But small game abounded, and skill in shooting and stalking was still general, though perhaps the average of excellence was lower than it had been in 1881. Then again every Boer was a horseman and a horse-master. Riding to him was not an accomplishment acquired at a riding school, but his ordinary means of locomotion from childhood upwards. European cavalry whose minds are constantly intent on the problem of riding can never compete in reconnaissance with men who are hardly more conscious of their horses than of their boots. The European trooper takes his horse out of the regimental stables for a few hours. He brings it back, grooms it, and gives it the regulation issue of forage. Of the things that are vital in war—the limit of a horse's capacity to cover long distances and to carry heavy weights, the minimum of food and water and rest that it requires for continuous effort, the precautions by which its strength can be husbanded—he has no inkling. To the Boer, accustomed to spend day after day in the saddle, the knowledge of these things was second nature. The Boer pony was no less trained than its master. It was accustomed to make long journeys, to sleep in the open, to spend every spare moment in picking up food. More important still, it was trained to stand still when its rider dismounted. This fact alone meant a direct increase of thirty-three per cent. to the effective strength of a Boer force compared with the same number of British mounted infantry in which one man in every four has to stay behind to hold the horses. The greater part of war is based on questions of transport and supply. The Boer was a born transport rider. Whether with ox-wagons, mule-wagons, or Cape carts, the Boer could go twice as far in a day as the British transport officer. There was some truth in the exaggeration, that given two or three hours' start, Boer oxen could always get away from British cavalry. The Boer lived frugally in times of peace. Hunting or travelling he was accustomed to take several days'

provision of food, sometimes even of water, with him and to make that provision last. A small bag of Boer rusks, a pocketful of *biltong*,* a little coffee tied up in a bit of cloth, would keep him for a week. For a campaign he thus started with enormous advantages over the British soldier, whose whole life in the army and before he entered it was a training in improvidence.

The Boer as a student of military history.

Lastly, the Boer received a valuable training in a subject the knowledge of which has always been essential to generalship, and will, in the war of the future, be no less essential to the efficiency even of the common soldier, namely military history. It may not have been military history as taught at Camberley, but it was military history none the less. Among a primitive people, undisturbed by all the thousand and one distractions of a bustling civilisation, wars and battles are the events that impress themselves most deeply on men's minds, and every detail of them is remembered and repeated from mouth to mouth for a generation. There was no lack of fighting in the history of the Boers, hardly a district in the Republics where, within the memory of the older generation, some battle had not taken place. To the British soldier the battles even of the last twenty or thirty years are mere names. There were few Boers in either Republic who had not heard, again and again, with every circumstantial detail, how Pretorius slaughtered the Zulus on Dingaan's Day, how Franz Joubert ambushed the redcoats at Bronkhorst Spruit, or how Nikolas Smit sent them leaping over the cliffs of Majuba. The wonderful skill shown by the Boers in their choice of ground for attack or defence, the correct appreciation of the tactical objective that enabled hundreds of men, acting in almost complete independence of each other, to carry out a combined movement, were not due to the mere natural instincts of the untrained civilian. They were the results of the accumulated military experience of generations, stored in the mind of every single burgher. The saying that every Boer was his own general is true in more senses than one, for every Boer knew something of generalship.

Absence of discipline.

But the Boer was also his own general in another sense, one by no means conducive to military efficiency. There are

* Strips of venison or beef dried hard in the sun.

other qualities, besides individual skill, without which no army can be an efficient instrument of war. They are the moral qualities which are summed up in the word "discipline." In these the Boer was sorely lacking. There could be no contrast greater than that between the British soldier—practically untrained, but possessing, as few have ever possessed them, those moral qualities of "indomitable courage, uncomplaining fortitude, and implicit obedience," which alone enable an army to overcome great difficulties and make good serious defects—and the Boer, far more skilled in every accomplishment of war, but self-willed, unreliable, and capricious: alternately brave and cowardly, active and sluggish, confident and panic-stricken. It is difficult in any case to secure discipline with troops that have not been regularly trained together for a long period. But with the Boers this difficulty was increased tenfold by the intensely independent character of the people, and by the absence of all effective legal provision for the maintenance of discipline even in the field. There was no effective compulsion or authority of any sort in the Boer army. The Boer officers had practically none of the executive powers of European officers. They were simply the chosen leaders of the burghers, and nothing more. They could give no orders either to the burghers or to each other, nor were there, in practice, any penalties they could inflict for disobedience. The British soldier joins the army of his own free will, but once in it puts himself absolutely at the disposal of his superiors. The Boer was compelled by law to serve, but there was no power that could compel him to fight or do anything else unless he chose to. The difficulties that such a state of affairs presented to a general can well be imagined. He could never count for certain upon the number of men he would have at his disposal in any battle. Any enterprise that involved considerable sacrifice of life was almost out of the question. Even if volunteers could be found to undertake it, half of them might fail at the last moment and leave their comrades in the lurch. The vigorous pushing home of an attack at the critical moment of a battle, or the sudden development of a counter-attack, were under such conditions almost impossibilities.

Consequent necessity of all plans being by general consent. The Krygsraad.

As a matter of fact, the decisions of a Boer army were taken, not by the highest officer present, but by a Krygsraad, or military council, composed of all the commandants, field-cornets and senior military officers. These alone were entitled to vote, but as many ordinary burghers as liked could crowd round to hear what was going on, and were not infrequently allowed to join in the discussion. The decision went by a simple majority, the vote of a field-cornet counting equal with that of a general. After the meeting the officers explained the scheme to their burghers. On occasion it could happen that a plan approved of by the Krygsraad had to be abandoned because no burghers could be found ready to carry it out. But as a rule the ordinary burgher had a democratic respect for the decisions of a council which he had not for those of a single individual. This system of deliberation was, no doubt, in some respects a source of weakness, but it was not without its compensating advantages. In the first place it was the only way of making sure that any plan would be executed by the burghers. It had the further advantage that whatever plan was decided upon was understood by all who took part in the battle. And modern fighting, with its extended formations, and with the difficulty of conveying any orders to the firing line, though it has not done away with the need for secrecy in a general's plans, makes it more and more imperative that, within limits, the soldier should understand what he is doing and be allowed a certain elasticity in doing it. Again, the full discussion of alternatives, though it might sometimes end in the rejection of the best plan, generally eliminated those which contained obvious absurdities, while it often gave an able officer of lower rank occasion to show his quality and helped to secure that rapid promotion of the fit and elimination of the unfit which is so necessary for the officering of an army.

Stimulus of patriotism. Boers enormously improved by discipline.

The absence of discipline in the Boer forces was to some extent compensated by patriotism. In a war such as that against Sikukuni, the evils of indiscipline showed themselves at their worst. But where, as in the present war, their most cherished national ideals and the material interests of a favoured and subsidised class have been at issue, the Boers

have shown a tenacity, and an unwillingness to acknowledge defeat, which have largely stood in the stead of the cohesion and dash of disciplined troops. It is impossible not to recognise in them the descendants of the men who for thirty years held the dykes and fortified cities of Holland against the invincible infantry of Spain. Nevertheless it is certain that the Boers would have been a far more formidable power if only they had introduced some, even the most rudimentary, form of discipline into their military system. What they might have done was shown by the Johannesburg police, who, simply because they had learnt the elements of discipline, were worth fully double their number of ordinary burghers. It was shown, too, by the greater boldness displayed in the later stages of the war by some of the commandos as the direct result of the introduction of a system of discipline by leaders like Botha and De La Rey.

Boer permanent forces: Police.

Besides its burghers, each State possessed the nucleus of a small permanent force in its artillery and its police. The total strength of the Transvaal police at the outbreak of war was some 1400 men. Of these, considerably over one-half were in peace time the ordinary foot policemen of Johannesburg and Pretoria, while the rest were mounted police engaged in keeping order in the country districts and on the goldfields. In war they were all mounted, and fought in the same style as the ordinary burghers. But whereas the burghers were practically unofficered, the 1400 police had over 20 officers, and about 100 non-commissioned officers. Whatever the defects of the "Zarp" as a policeman, he undoubtedly made a first-class fighter, combining the skill of the Boer with the courage and self-sacrifice of the disciplined soldier. The police played a prominent part in scores of engagements, and in losing battles, like Driefontein and Bergendal, they showed that they could face heavy loss of life as bravely as the best of the troops opposed to them. Equally good were the Swaziland police, whose strength was increased shortly before the war to about 400 men. One of the most gallant deeds of the war was the attempt made near Amersfort, on August 7, 1900, by a detachment of these men to capture a British battery by a frontal charge across perfectly open ground.

The Free State maintained a small force of police, mounted and foot, in peace times, but it did not take the field as a separate fighting body.

Artillery.

The Transvaal Corps of State Artillery was first formed in 1890. Two of its officers—Majors J. F. Wolmarans and P. E. Erasmus—were sent to Europe for some years to study European artillery systems, and returned shortly before the Raid to supervise the intended increase and reorganisation of the corps. At the time of the Raid, however, its strength was only about 100 men, though it was increased to 400 immediately after. In 1899 it numbered 800, of whom half were reservists. The men served for three years, receiving five shillings a day. They were all burghers, though a certain number of them were foreigners by birth, and had served in European armies. Foreigners played a considerable part in the training and instruction of the force during the years between 1896 and 1899. But in the main the State Artillery was not a foreign but a Boer force. It was fairly well trained. The marksmanship was excellent, the natural aptitude of the Boer for shooting displaying itself as well with cannon as with rifle. On the other hand, very few of the artillerymen had fully mastered the intricacies of the time fuze for shrapnel firing.* The Free State artillery was an older institution than that of the Transvaal, having been first organised in 1880 by Major Albrecht, who remained at the head of it till his capture at Paardeberg. Like the Transvaal artillery, it contained some foreign officers, but the bulk of the men were Boers. The total strength of the force, including reserves, was about 400. Albrecht was a good officer, and his little force was, even according to European standards, well-trained.

Skill of Boers in adapting artillery to Boer tactics.

There were many critics who predicted that in war modern artillery would only interfere with the freedom of movement of the Boer skirmishing line, and lead to an attempt to conform to European ideas, for which the Boer organisation was entirely unsuited. Thus the 'Military Notes' believed that "the necessity of escorting, both on the

* *Cf.* P. Combes' 'Les Héros Boers,' p. 174, where M. Grunberg is quoted as saying that, owing to the inability of the Boers to work ordinary shrapnel, he manufactured for them a "*projectile mixte*," which gave excellent results.

march and in action, three or four batteries of field artillery, will entail some modification of the loose tactics of the Boers, and thus cause them embarrassment." This opinion was even shared by some of the Boers themselves. A few days before the declaration of war the writer heard burghers in the laager at Sandspruit speaking of the artillery as a doubtful experiment, and expressing the hope that their commando would not have to be told off to look after it. These criticisms proved very mistaken. The Boers had purchased the most modern European weapons, but they in no way felt obliged to adopt European methods of using them. The Creusot or Vickers-Maxim was impressed into the service of the Boer tactical system in the same spirit as the Mauser rifle. The Boer, once the war began, no more thought of using his artillery in batteries, or providing it with an escort in action because that was the practice of European armies, than he thought of learning the German parade step as a necessary accompaniment to the use of the Mauser. The Boer artilleryman worked his gun on exactly the same tactical principles as the ordinary burgher worked his rifle. He made every use of cover, natural or artificial, changing his position whenever he found that the enemy had located it. He held back his fire if he hoped to lure his enemy into an ambush, though otherwise he preferred to keep him at arm's length, making the fullest use of any superiority he possessed in range over the opposing artillery. Escort in the field was unnecessary, for he always hitched up his team and trekked out of range if there was any danger of the enemy getting too near. The defects of the Boer artillery were those of the Boer system as a whole, an excessive unwillingness to risk exposure in the open, and a lack of co-operation which made it difficult to concentrate fire upon a definite objective. These defects are specially serious in artillery, but in criticising the Boer gunners we must always allow for the fact that they were usually outnumbered by four to one, or even more, by what was, perhaps, the best trained artillery in Europe.

The scientific side of war.

There were other respects, besides the use of modern artillery, in which the Transvaal showed that since Majuba

Telegraphs and heliographs.

it had learnt to recognise the scientific side of war. Attached to the State Artillery was a field telegraph section, which, under Lieutenant Paff, did excellent work throughout the campaign. All the laagers round Ladysmith and on the Tugela, and subsequently on the Biggarsberg, were in constant connection with each other and with Pretoria. The ordinary postal telegraph system of both republics was very complete, and every commando, over the whole theatre of war, was kept informed of all the operations taking place elsewhere, while a summary of war news (somewhat garbled occasionally for military or political reasons) was posted up daily in every village in the hands of the Boers. Even after the capture of Pretoria and the march to Komati Poort, the Transvaal government, at Pietersburg or Roos Senekal, kept in telegraphic communication with the commandos under Botha and De La Rey; while in districts only temporarily occupied, Boer telegraphists would use the wires for their own communications or endeavour to tap messages coming from the British. So ready to welcome new ideas for military purposes were the Boers, that shortly before the war they ordered a large consignment of wireless telegraphy installations, which, however, arrived too late and fell into British hands. Heliographs, which in the open landscape and sunny climate of South Africa can be worked in most favourable conditions, were largely used by the Boers, even in the latest stages of the war, and regular chains of signalling stations were kept up over long distances. Thus the Boers on Lord Roberts' flank after the occupation of Bloemfontein had signal stations connecting them directly with their headquarters at Kroonstad.

The Netherlands Railway.

But the most important instrument of scientific warfare in the hands of the Boers was the Netherlands Railway. This company, the existence of whose monopoly was bound up with the Kruger policy, naturally exerted its utmost endeavours on behalf of its patrons. A great part of the Boer mobilisation was carried out by it. During the period of Boer successes it worked the railway in the occupied districts for the Boer armies, while on the retreat it carried

out the blowing up of bridges and culverts in the colonies and in the Free State. Its well-equipped railway works were turned into a most serviceable military arsenal, where injured cannon were repaired, a howitzer constructed, time fuzes and other parts of projectiles manufactured in large quantities. It was to the Boer army what Woolwich and the Royal Engineers are to the British.

Transport and supply services.

As regards field-transport, remounts, supplies, clothing, etc., the law provided for the appointment of a commissary-general and a commissariat staff. But the system had worked very badly in the Mpefu campaign, and in practice the Boers relied mainly on the ability of each individual burgher to look after himself, and on the power of commandeering. At the outbreak of war the more prosperous burghers came into the field provided not only with the obligatory pony and ten days' rations, but with innumerable ox wagons, mule wagons, and Cape carts, containing abundant provisions for weeks of campaigning, with spare ponies, and with Kaffir servants to look after all these. The transport and ponies which the field-cornets commandeered were simply supplementary, and for the use of those burghers who had none of their own. When the Boer was in a fixed camp like Ladysmith or Mafeking, his *vrouw* would trek over from the farm, bringing a waggon-full of good things: cakes and Boer rusks, meat pasties and biltong, warm clothes and new boots. The task of the central organisation was thus enormously lightened. Still, even so, a good deal was done by the Transvaal government in the way of accumulating large stores of provisions and forage at Pretoria and the principal villages of the country. For many months before the war all the large provision, forage, and saddlery firms were encouraged to import heavy stocks, on the understanding that they were to be commandeered by the government at a fair profit in case of war. For the first nine months of war, at any rate, as long as the Boer forces maintained their cohesion, the Republican governments found no difficulty in supplying them with necessaries, though luxuries, such as sugar and coffee, began to be scarce at the end of six months. Even as late as

April, 1901, the mills at Pietersburg were turning out large quantities of flour for the commandos in the northern Transvaal.

Readiness to spend on Intelligence.

The sound military instinct of the rulers at Pretoria was shown not only in their readiness to adopt all the most modern additions to the art of war, and in their foresight in accumulating large stores of military necessaries, but in the importance they attached to the securing of intelligence. According to the 'Military Notes,' the Transvaal Intelligence Department was in 1898 spending £3250 monthly on its secret service agents in Johannesburg, in the Cape and Natal, and in England, *i.e.*, at least twenty times as much as the British Intelligence spent on secret service in South Africa. In the three years from 1896 to 1898, the department spent altogether £286,000. There were few towns or villages in South Africa where there was not an agent of the Transvaal. The slightest movement of British troops was at once reported to Pretoria. Communication with these agents was to a large extent kept up during the war itself. Even in besieged towns like Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, the investing forces kept themselves informed of what was going on within.

Field intelligence. Reliance on spies.

The Boer field intelligence and scouting in the war was of a very different character from the British. Long-range rifles and smokeless powder have greatly diminished the efficiency of ordinary cavalry scouting, especially in open country. The Boers recognised the fact by relying far more on spies, Boer or native, than upon their patrols for information. The task of spying was, however, made much easier for them by the sympathies of the population of the colonial border districts, by the absence of a distinctive uniform, and by the general unsuspiciousness of the British. Such patrols as the Boers did send out usually went a much greater distance ahead than British patrols, and would remain out several days at a time, occasionally sending back one of their number to communicate. After the first months of the war these patrols, or *brandwachts*, were to some extend superseded by the formation of regular corps of scouts such as Theron's Scouts, Edwards's Scouts, Ricchiardi's Scouts, often led with

great enterprise and ability, who acted both as cavalry patrols and as spies, and formed a screen in front of the commandos. A corps of cyclist despatch riders was also organised at the beginning of the war, and proved very serviceable both in carrying despatches between scattered commandos and in patrolling districts where there was some apprehension of trouble from the natives, such as the Swazi border. On the other hand, the actual safeguarding of the Boer camps was often very carelessly done, picket and sentry duties being altogether distasteful to the burghers. Hence night attacks upon the Boers frequently succeeded, and when they failed it was more often due to blunder or accident than to Boer watchfulness.

Rebels on the Boer side.

There are two other elements which were not a normal constituent of the forces of the two republics, but which played a prominent part in the present war: colonial rebels and foreign volunteers. As regards fighting qualifications the Dutch colonial rebel was, generally speaking, an inferior copy of his republican kinsfolk. This was partly because the rebels were in many districts recruited mainly from the *bywoner* or "poor white" class, and partly from the absence of the military experience and warlike spirit which animated the republican forces. As a rule they looted more and fought less; though some of them, such as the Griqualand rebels who attacked Sir C. Warren at Faber's Put, could fight with considerable determination. The Pretoria Government before the war placed great hopes on this factor, and from the reports of their agents they estimated that 30,000 to 40,000 rebels would join them as soon as Cape Colony was invaded and Ladysmith had fallen. If the earlier successes of the Boers had been more striking, and if they had had the enterprise to push on boldly into Cape Colony, it is not unlikely that this estimate might have been justified. As a matter of fact, the total number of British subjects who took active part in rebellion probably did not much exceed 10,000, and it is doubtful if more than half of that number were in the field at any one time. Besides these there were a good many British subjects actually resident in the Republics who took burgher rights immediately before the

war with the express object of fighting for the cause of a Dutch South Africa.

Foreigners with the Boers. Causes of friction.

As early as the end of August, 1899, some of the non-British Uitlanders offered their services to the Transvaal Government. Their motives were various: love of fighting, hatred of the British, the hope of future reward, or, as in the case of the Hollanders, desire to preserve a state of affairs in which they flourished. A German corps, some 300 to 400 strong, was formed under the command of Colonel Schiel, an ex-sergeant in the Prussian Army, who had been for many years in South Africa. He had at one time served in the Transvaal artillery, and was now commandant of the Johannesburg fort. He was not popular with his men, and a few days before the war a large section of them broke off and joined other commandos. The commando was still further diminished at Elandslaagte, where Schiel himself was made prisoner. The Hollander commando, some 400 strong, suffered even more severely on that occasion. There were two Irish brigades each about 100 strong, composed largely of Irish-Americans, and a Scandinavian corps of about the same strength. After the outbreak of war large numbers of European volunteers of every kind made their way to the Transvaal. Altogether the foreigners who at one time or another fought on the Boer side may have numbered somewhat over 2500 men, of whom about 1600 fought in separate organisations while the rest joined the various commandos. Besides the contingents just mentioned there was a French corps 300 strong, and smaller bodies of Americans, Italians, and Russians. Of all the foreigners the French played perhaps the most important part, and their leader, the gallant but unfortunate Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil, was shortly before his death appointed a general by the Boers and put in command of all the foreign contingents, a very high tribute from a people who had so supreme a contempt for European ideas of warfare. The foreigners with the Boers all fought in the Boer style. As a rule they showed themselves superior to the Boers in courage, but inferior in skill, and more than once, *e.g.* at Elandslaagte, Magersfontein, Boshof, allowed themselves to get

surrounded and captured or destroyed. Like the ordinary burghers, they received no pay, though no doubt they expected to be substantially rewarded if the Boers proved victorious. The relations between the Boers and their foreign allies were not always harmonious. Many of them were officers who had come out with the idea that they would confer the benefit of their scientific leadership upon these brave, untrained peasants, and incidentally win a name as generals. It was somewhat of a shock to these to be told plainly that their advice or leadership was not wanted, but that they were quite welcome to shoulder a rifle and serve in a commando. The foreigners expected to be overwhelmed with gratitude, and were disgusted to find that the Boers regarded their help chiefly as a testimony to the justice of their own cause, feeling grateful, if at all, to the God whose chosen people they imagined themselves. They complained that the Boers were always eager to give them the hardest fighting, to let them lead the assaults and cover the retreats, while claiming all the credit for themselves and rewarding the foreigner by stealing his horse or his provisions. Many who went out to South Africa enthusiastic admirers of the Boers returned disillusioned even to the extent, in some cases, of failing to appreciate the good qualities, either military or social, possessed by this peculiar people.

Kaffirs in Boer employ.

There remain the Kaffirs. These played a by no means unimportant part in the Boer military system. In very few cases were they actually used to fight, but they acted as spies, as transport drivers, as cattle herds, grooms and servants, they dug trenches, and in fact performed all those laborious duties which absorb so large a proportion of the men in a British force. Altogether there can hardly have been less than 10,000 Kaffirs regularly employed by the Boer forces during the war.

Total strength of the Boer forces.

The total number of men brought into the field by the Boers has been much discussed. The estimate of the 'Military Notes,' based on Boer official data, was that the total number of persons between the ages of sixteen and sixty liable to military service in the two Republics was 53,643, of whom 31,329 belonged to the Transvaal and 22,374

to the Orange Free State. The field cornets' lists were not very accurately kept, and a certain number of names probably figured on more than one list, so that the real total was, perhaps, a little less. But as very few burghers managed to escape service throughout the war, while on the other hand a certain number of boys under sixteen and old men over sixty volunteered at different periods, one may assume that fully 50,000 inhabitants of the two Republics took part in the war. Adding to these some 10,000 rebels and 2500 or more foreigners, we arrive at a total figure of 60,000 to 65,000 men who shouldered a rifle at one time or another during the course of the war. But it must not be supposed that anything approaching that total number of men were ever in the field at the same time. The Boer forces in the field on October 11, 1899, were somewhere between 37,000 and 40,000 men. A month later they may have been 42,000, and during December, when they stood at their highest, about 45,000: After that, in spite of the arrival of foreigners, the accession of rebels, and the calling out of those who had hitherto evaded service, the waste of war and the Boer habit of going home for a holiday began to make itself felt, and the numbers steadily declined. After Paardeberg and the relief of Ladysmith and the clearing of Cape Colony, large numbers went home resolved to give up the war, and it is doubtful if in March, 1900, there were 20,000 Boers in the field. In April, after De Wet's successes at Sannah's Post and Reddersburg, the figure rose again to perhaps 30,000. After the march to Pretoria it once more suddenly collapsed to 15,000 or 20,000. From that time on it has fluctuated up and down with every Boer success or reverse, the average meanwhile growing steadily less and less as the process of attrition has gone on.

Boer numbers, net totals.

But mere numbers are no criterion of effective military strength unless their meaning is clearly understood. When it is said that some 300,000 British troops have been sent out to South Africa against the Boers the total given is a gross total. When all the necessary deductions are made for lines of communication troops, for transport, remount, and supply services, and for the countless other subsidiary duties for which men have to be detailed, it is surprising how few,

relatively, remain over to put into the line of battle. But the figures just given for the Boers are net totals. Forty thousand Boers meant practically forty thousand rifles available for the firing line. When we further consider that on the South African veld a mounted man is worth fully three or four on foot, not only from the point of view of actual fighting, but also from that of securing supplies and living off the country, the wonder at the nominal disparity of numbers ceases, and gives place to a sense of admiration for the organising power, for the discipline, and for the adaptability by which so formidable an opponent was overcome.

The Boer army largely the creation of the early victories.

It was believed by many before the war that the very numbers of the Boers would prove to their disadvantage owing to their lack of generals trained to command large bodies of men, and to the absence of higher organisation; that their armies would be paralysed in the field for want of proper direction, starved in camp for want of supplies, and break up in confusion on the first vigorous attack. These critics failed to realise fully the extent to which the separate commandos, and even the separate burghers, looked after themselves, whether in the camp or on the battlefield. Still the criticism was not altogether mistaken. The Boer armies at the outbreak of war were deficient in cohesion. The burghers had never yet faced modern artillery or trained cavalry, and it was impossible to foretell if they would stand the test. The conviction among all who knew the Boers most intimately was that the first general engagement accompanied by heavy losses would see a stampede home of the whole Boer army. If a British force of even 50,000 men could have been in the field in October, 1899, and inflicted a few such reverses as Talana and Elandslaagte on a larger scale the war might possibly have been but of short duration. It was the time given the Boers to acquire self-reliance and experience and to supplement their deficient organisation that made them what they afterwards became. They fought the British Army piecemeal in the first three months of the war, and in the process they became an army themselves. Fortunately for ourselves, some of the lessons of the war were not fully learnt by them till it was too late. If Ladysmith, Kimberley or

Mafeking had been attacked with the determination with which the Boers attacked Clements at Nooitgedacht on December 14, 1900, or Smith-Dorrien's posts on the Delagoa line on January 7, 1901, or if Natal and Cape Colony had been invaded when our forces were small, without transport, and chained to the railway, with the rapidity and boldness with which Cape Colony was invaded fifteen months later in spite of barriers of strong posts and the hot-foot pursuit of flying columns, the course of the war might well have been very different.

Lack of generals on Boer side.

The lack of generals was undoubtedly one of the causes of the slowness of the Boers to take advantage of their great opportunities during the early months of the war. It would have gone hard indeed with the British if the Boers had been led by men like Lee or Stonewall Jackson. The only leaders that had any reputation or experience were Joubert and Cronje. Joubert had won distinction in native wars and in the war of 1881 as a cautious and shrewd leader. But in the present war he was undoubtedly a failure. He was nearly seventy years old, and almost at the very beginning of the war met with an accident which interfered with his riding. He entered into the war unwillingly, deeply impressed with the belief that in carrying an offensive campaign into British territory, the Boers could never win the Divine favour in the same degree as if they had waited within their own borders to repel the British attack. He was slow in all his movements, afraid to risk any action that might lead to loss of life. He had none of that personal influence by which leaders like Cronje or Botha could introduce some semblance of discipline, or inspire their men with courage. The lack of discipline was nowhere so bad as in the camps round Ladysmith, which degenerated into veritable picnic parties. And yet he jealously kept the bulk of his force there instead of sending them down to the Tugela, where they were far more needed. Cronje was more successful as a leader of men, but as a strategist he showed himself quite as inactive and undiscerning as Joubert. Nor did the war bring many able generals to the front. Guerilla leaders, indeed, of activity and resource

it produced not a few, one above all—Christian de Wet. But there are only two men on the Boer side to whom real generalship and organising power can be attributed: Louis Botha and "Koos" De La Rey. And neither, fortunately for us, had a free hand till it was too late to do more than prolong the struggle in the hope of wearing out the purse and the patience of the conquerors.

Analysis of the Boer tactical system. Pure fire tactics.

Such success as the Boers achieved in the war was the success not of their generals, of their organisation, or of their personal courage, but of their tactical system. The various features of that system have been touched upon in tracing its historical development, but it may be convenient to sum them up at this point.

The first feature—the feature of which all the others are but corollaries—is the use of rifle fire only. The Boer was a rifleman pure and simple, and his tactics were rifleman's tactics. Neither in his equipment nor in the formations he adopted in the field was there any of that compromise between the rifleman and the pikeman or the mediæval knight that is characteristic of the European soldier. His object in battle was not to get at the enemy, but to get into a position from which an accurate and deadly fire could be poured into the enemy's ranks with as little loss to himself as possible. The marksmanship of the Boers was, with individual exceptions, hardly as good as is often supposed, especially when they were flurried, but it was, on the whole, decidedly superior to that of the British. Even more decided was their superiority in fire discipline. It was not mechanical as with the British, but was inherent and instinctive. There were no volleys at the word of command, no standing and kneeling positions. But it is a mistake to suppose that there was no combined fire action on the part of the Boers, nothing beyond uncontrolled individual fire. The Boers fully understood the importance of covering the advance of one party of men by the fire of another, or of sweeping a position with a hail of bullets; and careful of ammunition as they usually were, no one could spend it faster when occasion required. One can distinguish three distinct kinds of fire which the Boers used, each appropriate to its own particular phase of an

engagement. There was, first of all, the carefully aimed individual fire, in which each shot was fired at some definite person, and only when there was good prospect of hitting him. This was the fire used for all the earlier stages of an attack or defence, and throughout by those who could secure perfect cover. Secondly, there was the heavy continuous fire, directed rather than aimed, which was kept up to cover the last period of an attack, or in the defence to check the rush of a charging enemy. Lastly, and less frequently, there was the "snapping" fire from the hip or shoulder at close quarters, especially upon a demoralised or retreating enemy—the Boer equivalent, and a very effective one, for the bayonet, whether at the conclusion of a successful attack, or at the critical moment when a charging enemy wavered and fell back. Majuba affords an excellent example of all these methods in the attack. No less important an element of fire discipline is the power of holding back fire so as to entice an enemy within a range from which he cannot escape without heaviest loss. This power of self-restraint is one of the most difficult to ensure in troops. The Boers, artillery as well as riflemen, possessed it, not through discipline, but by virtue of the instinct acquired by generations of deer-stalking and of economising ammunition. Another characteristic of Boer fire methods was the preference for a flanking fire. Whether in attack or defence, the picked marksmen would always take up positions unobserved in front of the flanks of their line. While the enemy concentrated all his attention upon the main line and chose his cover to meet their fire, the flankers could pick his men off at leisure.

Use of ground.

The second feature is the use of ground. To get within range of the enemy unobserved and to be protected from his fire while he is exposed to yours was the keynote of the Boer method; and that can only be done by making use of every unevenness of the ground, of every stone, of every bush or tuft of grass. In European tactics the value of ground from the rifleman's point of view is obscured by the traditions of older methods of warfare. The rigid formations necessary for an effective charge, whether on horse or on

foot, are incompatible with a skilful use of ground by the individual. There is a tendency to regard all the unevennesses of the ground as mere incidental obstacles, useful to the defence rather than to the attack. To the Boer, looking at things only from the rifleman's point of view, the formation of the ground was the one thing important, the alpha and omega of tactics: the order of the men, the arrangement of the attack or defence, all else was subordinate to it. The ground played the part in Boer warfare that wind, waves, and tide played in the naval warfare of the eighteenth century. Skill in the use of it was as essential to the Boer as seamanship was essential to the admirals and captains of that day. And the Boer, accustomed to spend his life in the open, was as superior in his eye for ground to the British officer and soldier fresh from the barracks and the parade ground, as Nelson's weather-beaten captains and crews were superior to the harbour-trained enemies whom they out-manœuvred. The more varied the ground the greater, within certain limits, are the opportunities for the exercise of skill. Ground where cover is too easy and the field of vision too limited, tends to equalize skilful and unskilful, and is therefore against the former. The ideal country for rifle tactics is one where cover is abundant for those who have the skill to use it, while the unskilful are ever left in the open. The South African veld with its clear atmosphere, with its lack of trees and hedges, but with its rock-littered kopjes, deep cut dongas, and gentle folds of ground, is such an ideal country.

Boer intrenchments.

Where the ground did not afford sufficient natural cover the Boers spared no labour or thought in providing artificial cover either in the form of *schanzes* or sangars, *i.e.*, small shelters of piled stones, or in the form of trenches. They proved themselves very masters in trench work. They have shown that if a trench is made deep enough and narrow enough it will offer almost perfect protection from shrapnel fire. Their trenches and shelters were always made with the same instinctive skill at concealment and use of such natural cover as the ground afforded, as they showed when manœuvring freely across the veld. The trenches were not field earth-

works with great mounds of fresh earth in front to serve as range finders, but holes discreetly concealed with grass and twigs, and invisible even within deadly rifle range. To protect themselves against flanking fire they would make these trenches discontinuous, and full of sharp curves. Each trench usually had its covered approach from some donga or fold in the ground which offered facilities for reinforcement or escape. To make a position secure they would carry these elaborate fortifications, in places excavated through solid rock, across twenty or thirty miles of front.

Difficulty of discovering strength of Boers.

One result of the skill of the Boers in making use of the ground to conceal themselves was that their numbers could never be ascertained; cavalry scouting, reconnaissance in force, artillery bombardment were alike useless for the purpose. Against such an enemy the cumbrous European organisation was almost helpless. There was nothing to tell a general whether his path was barred by 50, 500, or 5000 men. He might assume the first and march ahead till his men came into a withering fire against which they could not advance, and from which it was hardly less difficult to retire without heavy loss in casualties and prisoners. Or he might assume the last and after a day or more spent in an elaborately prepared attack find, on charging the position, that his division had been played with by a few score men to be seen placidly jogging away over the next ridge. With smokeless powder, magazine fire, and long ranges these difficulties will attend all military operations in future, and success will lie more than ever with those who are best able to deceive and mystify. Like every other feature of Boer warfare, *slimness* has received an enhanced importance from modern conditions.

Extended formations.

The third feature of the Boer system was the extended formation. For an army that employed fire tactics only, solid formations were a pure waste of men. The Boers put every available man into the firing line. The necessity for securing cover and the desire to get a flanking or enveloping fire continually tended to extend that line. To that tendency the latest improvements in weapons gave an enormous impetus. In the first place they made it all the more necessary as a

protection against the hail of rifle and shrapnel fire. Secondly, the greater range and rapidity of fire enabled fewer men to cover the same front, and made it possible, where cover was scanty, to leave gaps hundreds of yards wide which it would yet be impossible for an enemy to break through. Lastly, smokeless powder and skill in concealment enabled the line to be stretched even beyond what was safe because it was impossible for the enemy to detect the weak spots with certainty. To attempt to break through such a line was an unprofitable undertaking. The part attacked did not stay to be broken, but retreated, leaving the enemy to advance into a loop, where his position would be far worse than before. It was in order to encourage this that the Boers habitually made the "horns" of their line of battle much stronger than the "chest," to adopt the metaphor used by the Zulus for somewhat similar tactics.* The only danger they feared was that of being outflanked by a superior force, and being themselves enveloped. The wider they spread their line, the harder it was to outflank, and the longer the start given to the centre for its retreat.

Mobility an essential condition of extended formations.

The fourth feature of the Boer system was mobility. These extended formations were only effective on condition that the men could be spread out rapidly, that weak points in the line could be reinforced the moment they were threatened, unnecessary positions abandoned without delay, and the whole withdrawn quickly if the enemy proved too strong. None of these conditions could be fulfilled by infantry. One of the greatest difficulties our troops laboured under in the war, in its earlier stages especially, lay in the attempt to carry out open order tactics with infantry. Magazine fire made close formations impossible. At the same time extended infantry formations were inconceivably unwieldy. Whatever the nominal superiority of a British

* There is, however, no reason for supposing that the Boers learnt in this respect from the Zulus. The object of the Zulus was to crush an enemy by unexpected charges from both flanks. That of the Boers was to get a better field of fire, and to drive the enemy closer together so as to make him a better target. It was a device which originated with their hunting experiences, and was probably developed long before they came in contact with the Zulu *impis*.

force, it was almost always inferior in numbers at the decisive point of an action. However much it might march round the enemy's flank, it always found itself committed to a frontal attack when it got there. It was only when large mounted forces were organised that anything could be done with the Boers. The Boers themselves indulged in no such half measures as having a large proportion of mounted men. They were all mounted. It is impossible to exaggerate the advantage their mobility conferred upon them. One has only to see the South African veld to realise how helpless the foot soldier is upon it, and to understand the meaning of the many "regrettable incidents" that have taken place in this war.

Individual initiative equally indispensable.

The remaining important feature of the Boer system lies in the part played by individual initiative. Even if the primitive organisation of the Boers had allowed of a greater degree of discipline, it is evident that the wide extension of the fighting line, and the impossibility of bringing messages to it once it became closely engaged, made direct personal control by the leaders quite out of the question. All it was possible to do was to give general instructions and to trust to the individual intelligence and initiative of subordinate officers and ordinary burghers to carry out their spirit under the particular circumstances that might arise. That every Boer was his own general was not merely a peculiar characteristic but, in a sense, a necessary consequence of the whole system.

Logical completeness of the whole system.

Nothing comes out more plainly from this analysis of the Boer tactical system than its unity and completeness. Each one of the features analysed is the direct and necessary corollary of the others. Every logical consequence is followed out to its fullest extent. There is none of the patchwork and compromise between different methods and traditions that mark European tactics. That the Boer system in its essential principles is the tactical system of the future can hardly be doubted. The present war has finally established the unqualified supremacy of firearms over any form of the more primitive weapons. That absolute supremacy once granted, all its other consequences, use of ground, extended

order, universal mobility, individual initiative, logically follow. The victory of the future will lie with those who have the courage to apply that logic, to cast away from them the antiquated armoury of the past, and to place their whole reliance in the weapons of to-day and to-morrow.

CHAPTER III

THE EVE OF WAR

Possibility of war realised June 1899. Lord Wolseley urges mobilisation.

THE failure of the Bloemfontein Conference first brought home to the British Government the possibility of war with the Transvaal. For such a war the 9000–10,000 * Imperial troops at that moment stationed in South Africa were hopelessly inadequate, and the Cabinet had accordingly to contemplate the prospect, if negotiations broke down completely, of sending an expeditionary force large enough to march to Pretoria and there dictate terms definitely settling the internal and external relations of the Transvaal on a more satisfactory footing. As to the strength of the force required, they consulted the Commander-in-chief, and Lord Wolseley on June 8 advised the Secretary of State that a force consisting of one complete army corps, one cavalry division, one battalion mounted infantry, and four battalions for lines of communication, in addition to the troops already in South Africa, would be sufficient for the purpose.† Lord Wolseley urged that this force should be forthwith mobilised on Salisbury Plain or at Aldershot, transport collected in South Africa, and, in fact, all preparations made for an immediate campaign. The plain threat conveyed by such a step might induce Kruger to listen to reason. If not,

* Three infantry battalions, two cavalry regiments, three batteries R.F.A., and a mountain battery in Natal; three and a-half battalions of infantry, two companies garrison artillery, and a few Engineers in Cape Colony.

† The total force available on mobilisation, according to the standard accepted (in 1899) by the nation and the War Office, was three army corps and four cavalry brigades (*i.e.* two divisions) for home defence, and it was generally reckoned that in an emergency two army corps and all the cavalry could be sent abroad.

the sooner the crisis was got over and the less time given the Boers to complete their armaments the better. Looking back, it is easy to see how much there was to be said for Lord Wolseley's view. Kruger, in spite of his bellicose speeches, was not anxious for war in June, and if he had been convinced then that the British Government was in real earnest, he might very possibly have "climbed down," as he had on more than one occasion climbed down before. At the end of September, when Kruger framed his arrogant ultimatum, more than three months of controversy had passed, during which his own temper and that of his burghers had been steadily rising, during which many million rounds of ammunition and some guns were added to the Boer armaments, and during which the dry winter months unfavourable to mounted troops had passed away. Even if the menace of mobilisation had failed to preserve peace, it is unlikely that it would have been followed by immediate aggression in June as it was in October. In the interval all those essential preparations which took longest to complete, such as the purchase of some 12,000 mules and of mule transport, or the adaptation of existing transport, and their concentration in South Africa—a matter, it was reckoned, of thirteen weeks—would have been pushed forward, while the expeditionary force would have had a month or more in camp to get into fighting trim.

The Government opposed to a policy of menace. Political wisdom of their decision.

But this was not the policy of the Government. The Government were determined to do nothing that could possibly be construed as a desire to force a war upon the Transvaal,* before exhausting every resource of diplomacy, and refused to mobilise an army corps or even to sanction any expenditure on preparations which they knew could not be kept secret. Militarily, and probably diplomatically, their decision was unsound. Politically it was wise. The Government had a righteous cause, and were exceedingly anxious to do nothing that could put that cause in the wrong in the eyes of moderate men, whether among English Liberals, in the British Colonies, or even among the Dutch population of Cape Colony and the Orange Free State. They ran great

* See Vol. I., p. 286 *sqq.*

risks, but they had their reward when war was brought upon them in the strength and earnestness of national feeling in England, in the general rally of the Colonies to the help of the Mother Country, and in the correct attitude of the Cape Ministry. The combination of diplomatic pressure and military preparation may be appropriate and free from misunderstanding in the circumstances of Continental Europe. But it is alien to the character and circumstances of a democratic Empire, whose chief reliance is in moral force, especially in its relations with smaller or partially dependent states. The Sikh war of 1845 presents in this respect a close parallel. Then, as in 1899, the Government and Lord Hardinge, in their anxiety to do nothing to "justify hostilities and place themselves in the wrong," refused to make any but defensive preparations, till the Sikhs actually invaded British territory with 65,000 men and 150 guns.

Defensive preparations on a small scale, June–September 1899.

Defensive preparations on a very small scale were, however, carried out during the next three months. As early as June 16, the War Office promised to send three batteries of field artillery to the Cape. On July 7 the authorities announced that two companies of engineers and departmental corps had been recently despatched to South Africa, that reserves of supply and ammunition had been sent out, that the general commanding in South Africa, Sir W. Butler, had been authorised to complete the transport arrangements for the troops in his command,* that a number of special service officers were being sent out; lastly, that the Commander-in-Chief had been engaged in completing the organisation and composition of the larger force which it might be necessary to send in case of a breakdown of negotiations. It did not add, though the decision had already been come to,

* The deficiency of the Cape garrison in that respect had been somewhat disconcertingly revealed over a year before on the occasion of troubles in Basutoland, which at one moment threatened to be serious. It was then discovered that it would take over two months to get a single brigade of infantry equipped and ready to invade Basutoland. In spite of earnest and repeated representations, it was not till war with the Transvaal was imminent that the most necessary expenditure for field transport for the Cape garrison was sanctioned, and even now it was only regimental transport on a limited scale for which permission was granted.

that the command of that larger force was to be assigned to Sir Redvers Buller, the General commanding at Aldershot. The special service officers sent during this period included Colonel Baden-Powell, Lieut.-Colonel Plumer, and half-a-dozen other officers deputed to make arrangements for the organisation of local defensive forces, Lieut.-Colonel Kincaid and a number of engineer officers to look after the defences of important strategic posts, and Colonel C. H. Bridge and some officers of the Army Service Corps to organise transport, remounts, and supplies. Two regiments of mounted infantry, the Protectorate Regiment and Rhodesia Regiment, were, under Colonel Baden-Powell's direction, recruited and drilled during August and September by Colonels Hore and Plumer to patrol the Bechuanaland and Rhodesian frontier. The former corps was posted at Ramathlabama, just outside the boundary of Cape Colony, seventeen miles north of Mafeking, at which latter place, owing to the foresight and business enterprise of the well-known South African contractors, Messrs. Julius Weil, large stores of supplies were accumulated with a view to the probability of the town becoming a base of important military operations. The headquarters of Colonel Plumer's force was fixed at Buluwayo. In Cape Colony suitable positions for the defence of the principal bridges across the Orange River, and the more important towns and railway junctions, were selected or re-examined. Transport, remounts, and supply were to some extent organised. Lines of supply from the three ports were drawn up by Colonel Bridge. Storehouses and supply and remount depôts were fixed at the ports and inland. The resources of the country—including the Republics—in supplies and draught animals of all kinds were examined. Contracts for the purchase of nearly 4000 mules, a number of mounted infantry cobs, and considerable quantities of supplies, and for the hire of enormous quantities of ox transport from Messrs. Weil and other contractors, were drawn up ready for instant completion. Officers of the Intelligence Division travelled busily up and down the Republics and border districts, showing, in some cases, more zeal for information than skill in concealing their identity.

Opposition of Cape Ministry and of Sir W. Butler. The latter recalled August 15.

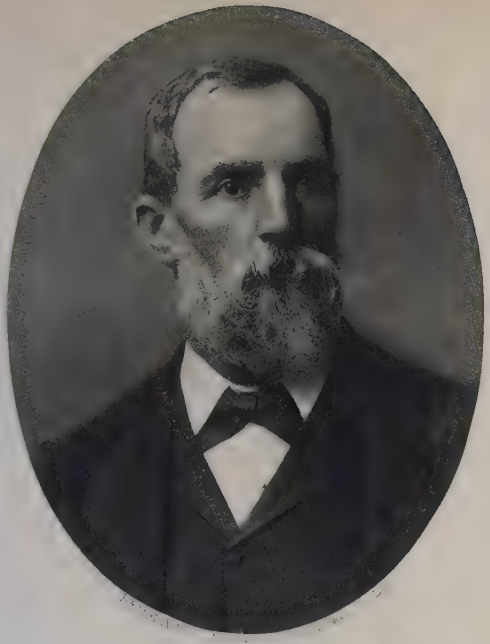
More could not be done in Cape Colony. The fear of provoking the Boers was, in the case of the Cape Ministry, not merely confined to offensive measures, but extended to the most necessary defensive precautions. While the free transit of military stores to the Republics was allowed,* the organising of local forces and the defence of Kimberley and Orange River Bridge were strenuously opposed by Mr. Schreiner, who was completely hoodwinked by the private assurances of President Steyn and Mr. Fischer, that under no circumstances would the Free State invade the Colony, but that any British preparations would only make the Free State burghers despair of peace. The difficulty was made even worse by the fact that these views of the Cape Ministry were shared by Sir W. Butler. Few realised better than that able officer the magnitude of the task to be undertaken in the event of a war with the Republics. But his strong political sympathies † blinded him to the real situation. The sending out of the special service officers, the raising of the Protectorate and Rhodesia Regiments, the first suggestions for raising the Imperial Light Horse, the plans for defending Mafeking and Kimberley, almost every precautionary measure, in fact, met with Sir W. Butler's opposition, and, in some cases, could only be carried through by the direct interposition of Lord Wolseley's authority. The situation was an impossible one, and was relieved on August 15 by Sir W. Butler's recall, and by the appointment of Sir F. Forestier-Walker to the command at the Cape.

Anxiety of Natal Ministry that the whole colony should be defended.

In Natal the situation was very different. The Natal Ministry, under Colonel (now Sir Albert) Hime, with a much clearer insight into the intentions of the Boers than was possessed by the Imperial Government or the Cape Ministry, saw from the very first the danger of a sudden invasion of British territory. It cannot be said that they, any more

* See Vol. I., pp. 305, 339.

† See Vol. I., pp. 220, 245. However, there is this to be said both for Mr. Schreiner and Sir W. Butler, that they only pushed the Government's avowed policy of no preparations to its logical conclusion. They were honestly convinced that these preparations on a small scale would only irritate and excite the Boers without affording any real protection in case of war.



RIGHT HON. HARRY ESCOMBE, P.C.,
PRIME MINISTER OF NATAL, 1897
DIED DEC., 1899.
Photo by Robertson,

LIEUT-COL. SIR ALBERT H. HIME,
K.C.M.G.
PRIME MINISTER OF NATAL, 1899
Photo by Watson,

than the British Government, realised how formidable was the military power of the Boers. But they were exceedingly anxious that in the event of war the whole colony should be protected from invasion. Now the peculiar position of Northern Natal, as a narrow, triangular wedge squeezed in between the Free State and the Transvaal, made its defence, strategically, one of extreme difficulty. Whatever the estimate formed of the fighting quality of the Boers—and no one rated it lower than Sir W. Penn Symons, who commanded the forces in Natal—it was evident that the defence of the whole colony would require almost double the force sufficient if the northernmost portion were abandoned. It was the insistence of the Natal Ministry on this point which, inspired though it was by political rather than military reasons, in the result certainly saved the situation in South Africa when the war broke out.

General Symons' views. Ministry insist on adequate reinforcements being sent.

As early as May 25,* Sir A. Milner assured the Natal Ministry that the colony would, if necessary, be defended by "the whole force of the Empire." On July 13 the Ministry asked Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson to inform them as to the provision made against a sudden attack, and were surprised to learn, on July 24, that General Symons considered the force then in Natal, even aided by the Natal Volunteer forces, insufficient to do more than to hold the colony up to the Dundee coal mines and to secure Ingagane railway bridge, leaving Newcastle and the northern apex of Natal to the Boers. In a minute of July 21, General Symons expressed the belief that to hold Newcastle another 1600 men would be sufficient, but that some 5600 men more, viz., two cavalry regiments, four infantry battalions, 500 mounted infantry, three batteries R.F.A., and one battery R.H.A., would be necessary if it was proposed that he should hold Laing's Nek and make the whole colony safe from invasion. On August 3, Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed that arrangements were being made to add at least another 2000 men to the Natal garrison. But the Natal Ministry were by no means satisfied that all was well, and on September 6 they sent an

* See Blue-book, Cd. 44, 1900, for the whole question of the defence of Natal.

urgent message for reinforcements sufficient to hold Laing's Nek and protect the whole colony from an invasion which might have a most demoralising effect on the natives and encourage disloyalists in both colonies. They were convinced not only that the Boers meant war, but that they meant to strike their blow before reinforcements could arrive. They pointed out that every preparation had been made by the Boers, that food and warlike stores in large quantities had been accumulated at Standerton, Volksrust and Vryheid, that Natal was full of Boer spies, and that attempts were being made to tamper with the natives. They deprecated calling out the colonial volunteers till absolutely necessary, but they were taking steps to add to their effective numbers and increase their efficiency. They were ready to arm any regular force of 500 men formed by the Imperial Government. They had telegraphed for 2000 more rifles and 250,000 rounds of ammunition.

Cabinet decide on September 8 to raise forces in South Africa to strength adequate for defence.

The arrival of this message coincided with the final breaking off by the Transvaal of negotiations opened by Mr. Smuts three weeks earlier,* and with the violent and aggressive debate in the Volksraad following upon Mr. Reitz's request for explanations of "the alleged massing of British troops." † War was no longer only a possibility, but a strong probability—almost a certainty thought many, though not the Government or, apparently, the Commander-in-Chief. The Cabinet met on September 8 to decide what steps to take. The problem was not an easy one, even on the lowest estimate of Boer prowess. Thirteen weeks were required before the expeditionary force fixed on by the War Office would be ready to start operations. The Boers could put 40,000 men in the field in as many days. Would the Boers patiently wait out the thirteen weeks, or would they declare war while the advantage was still on their side? And if so, how was

* See Vol. I., pp. 335 *sqq.*

† The aggressive character of that request may be judged by the fact that, with the exception of a few engineers and army service corps, not a single unit had been landed in South Africa since the Bloemfontein Conference, that none of those in South Africa had been moved from Ladysmith or Cape Town, and that there were only two battalions, the 1st Munster Fusiliers and 1st Manchesters, on the water.

the interval to be bridged over? The Cabinet decided to do three things. First of all to raise the garrison of South Africa without delay to a strength sufficient to repel any aggression on the part of the Boers and to protect the whole territory of the colonies. Secondly, to continue its efforts for peace. Thirdly, to await the effect of its despatch of September 8 before making up its mind to embark on the expensive preparations necessary for the equipment of the army corps.

An additional 10,000 men, thought sufficient, to be drawn from India and the Mediterranean.

To render the colonies absolutely secure, they were advised that an addition of 10,000 men to the existing garrison would be ample. For these it was decided to draw upon the Mediterranean stations and upon the British garrison in India. There were obvious reasons for such a step. It was almost impossible—owing to the linked battalion system—to send 10,000 men from England without calling up the reserves, a step which might have precipitated the war, or else sending out half battalions.* The foreign battalions, on the other hand, were always at war strength. The Indian troops, moreover, had the advantage of being at least a week nearer to Durban. How all important was that advantage was soon to be seen. The War Office have been criticised for weakening the Indian army by this step. Such a criticism, based on the assumption that the whole of our splendid foreign service army is a strictly localised garrison which cannot be touched, whatever the political situation, and that England is the only quarter from which reinforcements can possibly be drawn, displays a radical failure to comprehend the conditions of Imperial defence.

Prompt despatch of Indian contingent.

Already, in the first days of August, the Indian military authorities had been warned to hold a cavalry and an infantry

* See Vol. II., p. 17. It is true that an alternative scheme was framed by Lord Wolseley for sending a force of 10,000 men from home by utilising the Guards and the battalions just due for foreign service. But Lord Lansdowne, unwilling to interfere with the roster of reliefs or a possible larger mobilisation, wisely decided on the other alternative. It has also been suggested that the Government might have made up 10,000 men by calling out Class A of the Reserves only. It is doubtful whether Class A was then sufficiently large for the purpose. Even if it had been, such a step might well have excited the Boers without according any of the advantages of a complete mobilisation.

brigade in readiness for South Africa. It was subsequently decided that India should supply the reinforcement of 5600 men advised by General Symons as necessary to secure the whole of Natal, and this was the force telegraphed for immediately after the Cabinet meeting. The preparedness of the army in India for active service is proverbial. But never before had the efficiency of the Simla executive been able to do the Empire a better service. Trade chartering was fortunately at this period brisk between Bombay, Burma and China, so that the taking up of transport presented no difficulties and created no great delay. The troops themselves were ready in every respect, and within forty-eight hours of the orders to embark, the regiments and battalions warned were waiting on the embarkation quays at Bombay and Calcutta. The first transport set sail on September 17, and sixteen out of nineteen had left for Durban by September 25. The force was composed of three cavalry regiments: the 5th Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers and 19th Hussars; four infantry battalions: the 1st battalion Gloucestershire Regiment, the 2nd battalion Gordon Highlanders, the 2nd battalion King's Royal Rifles and the 1st battalion Devonshire Regiment; the 21st, 42nd and 53rd Field Batteries with an ammunition column and ammunition park, and a field hospital. Lieut.-Colonel Wolseley-Jenkins was nominated to command the cavalry brigade,* Colonel Yule, of the Devonshire Regiment, the infantry, and Lieut.-Colonel Coxhead, R.A., the brigade division of field artillery. With the force went Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter, then commanding at Quetta, who was designated, in the event of hostilities, for the important position of chief of the staff to Sir R. Buller. Circumstances decided otherwise, and the two were not to meet till long after the famous Army Corps and the sanguine expectations connected with it had vanished in the limbo of things forgotten.

Other troops.

Of other troops, besides the Indian contingent, the 1st Manchesters from Gibraltar and the 1st Munster Fusiliers from Fermoy (the only battalion from the home establishment sent out before the mobilisation), the former for Natal

* Subsequently superseded by Colonel Brocklehurst.

and the latter for Cape Colony, were already on the water. The following were sent out during the next few weeks: to the Cape, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers from Aldershot (on their way from Crete to the West Indies), the 1st Border Regiment from Malta, the remaining half of the Yorkshire Light Infantry from Mauritius, the 18th, 62nd and 75th Field Batteries and detachments of Engineers and Army Service Corps; to Natal, the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers from Egypt and the 2nd Rifle Brigade from Crete, a telegraph division and balloon section of engineers, and detachments of Army Service Corps and Ordnance Corps. These all arrived in the course of October, though the greater part were still at sea when the war broke out.

Sir G. White sent out to take the command in Natal.

As far as the actual number of troops sent out was concerned, Lord Lansdowne and the Commander-in-Chief were fully convinced that they were doing all that was necessary to render the British Colonies in South Africa safe against invasion. Still, they realised that the conduct of the defence against an enemy superior in numbers and mobility would, especially in Natal, be no easy task, and that any mistakes committed before the arrival of the Army Corps might throw out of gear the whole carefully elaborated scheme of operations. Sir W. P. Symons had seen considerable service both in South Africa and on the Indian Frontier and enjoyed a high reputation as a skilful and dashing leader in the field. But the qualities which had marked him out for distinction as a junior officer were not altogether those most required for the supreme command of difficult and delicate defensive operations. It was thought advisable to appoint an experienced senior officer to the control of the enlarged garrison of Natal. The choice fell on Sir George White, formerly Commander-in-Chief in India, in which capacity he had been responsible for the general direction of the North-West Frontier Campaign of 1897, and at the time in the War Office as Quartermaster-General. Sir G. White had in his younger days, at Charasiah and Kandahar, displayed the same headstrong boldness that distinguished Sir W. P. Symons, but he had since, in command of a brigade in Burma and in the Zhob Valley, shown

himself a cautious and careful leader, and he was thought eminently fitted for the responsible task of playing the Boers till the Army Corps was ready to take the field.* Of the officers who accompanied Sir G. White from Southampton on September 16, the one who was destined to make his mark most prominently in the course of the war was Colonel Ian Hamilton, Commandant of the Hythe Musketry School.

The Imperial Light Horse.

While these troops were hurrying out, such defensive preparations as were considered necessary were being carried out in South Africa. On September 8, permission was granted by the War Office for the raising at Maritzburg of a corps of mounted infantry from among the Uitlander population of the Transvaal. This was the Imperial Light Horse, the prototype of those irregular bodies of horse which were to play so important a part in the history of the war. At that time the need of such a force was not realised. The defensive force was considered adequate for its purpose, while nobody doubted the sufficiency of the Army Corps to settle the war in a few months. But there were certain Johannesburg men who determined that, whether help was wanted or no, the Uitlanders should have an opportunity to show to South Africa, to England and to the world the spirit that animated them, and to blot out the reproach that had fastened to them ever since the failure of the Johannesburg revolution. The life and soul of the movement which led to the formation of the Imperial Light Horse were Messrs. Woolls Sampson and "Karri" Davies, the two members of the Reform Committee who had spent a year and a half in Pretoria gaol sooner than crave pardon of President Kruger.† By the gallant part they

* The selection was also convenient for other reasons. Sir G. White had not found the War Office altogether congenial, and had recently accepted the appointment of Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Gibraltar, which was shortly to fall vacant. In view of the coming stress upon the quartermaster-general's department, it was expedient that the supreme control should be vested in an officer who would remain at his post throughout the campaign. The appointment of Sir G. White to the Natal command conveniently bridged over the period in which, under ordinary circumstances, he would have remained at the War Office, and enabled his successor, Sir C. Mansfield Clarke, to enter upon his duties immediately.

† See Vol. I., p. 179.

and their men played in the war they more than settled their long-standing score against the oligarchy at Pretoria. The numbers of the corps were originally fixed at 500. The standard of admission was high, so that it was a veritable *corps d'élite*. It was mainly officered by Uitlanders, but the command was entrusted to an Imperial officer, Colonel Scott-Chisholme of the 5th Lancers.

Preparations in Natal. Troops sent to Dundee Sept. 24.

The normal volunteer force of Natal consisted of about 1600 of all ranks, of whom about 900 were mounted riflemen, but it was increased to some 2000 by additional recruiting at this period. These were under the command of Colonel Royston. Besides these there were the Natal Mounted Police under Colonel Dartnell, of whom some 300 were available for military purposes. The actual calling out of these forces was deferred till September 29, but everything was done to get them in readiness. Two armoured trains for reconnaissance purposes were constructed by the Natal Government Railways, and guards were put at all the bridges on the railway as far as Newcastle. By September 13, Sir W. P. Symons had come to the conclusion that even with the force he had asked for, the holding of Laing's Nek would be an undertaking of some difficulty and risk, and it was decided, in case of war, only to occupy Natal as far north as Newcastle. On September 24, on being informed of the tenor of the British despatch of September 22,* Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson, in consultation with his ministers and Sir W. P. Symons, authorised the advance of the Ladysmith troops to Glencoe to protect the important collieries at Dundee. A further advance was deemed inadvisable as being likely to provoke the Boers to aggressive action, but General Symons fully intended to march up to Newcastle as soon as the troops from India should arrive.

Attitude of the Cape Government in September.

In Cape Colony there was, apart from the burgher levy, which in the circumstances would hardly have been called out, a volunteer force some 7000 strong, chiefly composed of the English inhabitants of the large towns, and two permanent corps, the Cape Mounted Rifles, mustering about 1000 men, and the Cape Mounted Police, of whom probably 1000 were available for military purposes. The latter especially, because

* See Vol. I., p. 350.

of their knowledge of the country and of the Dutch and native languages, proved a very useful body of men. The volunteers were mostly infantry, but there were small artillery corps at Cape Town and Kimberley. But all arrangements for organising the defence of the Colony were hampered by the attitude of the Ministry. Kimberley was the point most immediately threatened, both on account of its wealth and of its nearness to the Free State border. But all projects for organising the local forces or raising a town guard met with Mr. Schreiner's strongest opposition. A battery of six 7-pounders intended for the Diamond Fields artillery had been at the coast for three or four months, but had been kept back by a private understanding with the Free State Government and was only smuggled up to Kimberley in the middle of September by the subordinate officials in direct opposition to Mr. Schreiner's instructions. Profuse apologies from Cape Town to Bloemfontein followed. The explanation of this extraordinary conduct on the part of the Ministry lies in the genuine conviction Mr. Schreiner held as to the peaceful or at any rate purely defensive intentions of the Free State Government, and in his anxiety not to lose the confidence of the Bond Party by doing anything which might seem to go beyond the "neutrality" by which he hoped to secure their passive loyalty. That the Free State Government hesitated for some weeks before letting its commandos cross the Orange River, and that the rebellion in Cape Colony did not break out all over the Colony at the beginning of the war, are facts which may well be urged in justification of Mr. Schreiner's attitude. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that if the volunteer forces of Cape Colony had been called out at the same time as those of Natal, and sent, together with any other defensive corps that could hastily be raised, to guard the line of the Orange River, that line would never have been crossed. And without the moral support of invading commandos it is extremely unlikely that a general rebellion would have taken place.

North Lancashires sent to Kimberley Sept. 19.

Such steps as could be taken were, however, carried out. On September 19, Sir A. Milner succeeded in overcoming Mr. Schreiner's scruples, and the Loyal North Lancashires

were sent up from Cape Town to Orange River Bridge and Kimberley. Colonel Kekewich was put in command of the Kimberley garrison and busied himself with planning the defences of the town, but it was not till September 30 that a town guard was raised or any defence works actually begun. Mr. Schreiner, though opposed to the calling out of the volunteers, agreed to the stationing of small detachments of police near the frontiers to guard the bridges over the Orange River and the railway from De Aar to Mafeking. The Cape Government Railways constructed armoured trains at Cape Town and Kimberley for the purpose of patrolling the railway, and also began to make arrangements for the watching of bridges and culverts in the districts where disloyalists might tamper with the line. Armoured trains were also constructed at Buluwayo and every endeavour was made to secure the frontier of Rhodesia against invasion.

British Government decides on expeditionary force, Sept. 22.

We must now return to the preparations for the expeditionary force. The details of the mobilisation scheme had long ago been worked out in the War Office, and during August and September such preparations as the various departments could make without special expenditure and without attracting attention were quietly pushed forward. As early as August 18, preliminary notices had been sent out to the generals in command of districts, instructing them to take all necessary steps to avoid delay when the actual mobilisation order was issued. Stores were examined and appropriated at the mobilisation depots, ready to be drawn. Agents for the purchase of mules, remounts, and transport wagons had been sent out to the United States, to the Argentine Republic, to Spain, Hungary, and Italy. But it was not till after the Cabinet meeting of September 22 * that the Government made up its mind to the necessity of preparing the expeditionary force, and that the orders for the immediate putting in hand of the necessary field transport arrangements were telegraphed to the War Office agents abroad. The getting together and shipping to the Cape of the field transport for the whole army corps was supposed to take thirteen weeks. As the actual mobilisation, securing

* See Vol. I., p. 350.

of transports, and sending out of the force to South Africa would only take about half that time, there was no immediate necessity for calling out the reserves. On the contrary, such a step, though urged at the time by Lord Wolseley, might only have precipitated war at a moment when the Indian troops were still at sea and when the army corps would not be ready to take the field, as a whole, for several weeks after its arrival in South Africa.

Criticism of Government's delay.

But there undoubtedly is good ground for criticising the Government for not ordering these necessaries for the field army a fortnight earlier. The fear of awakening Boer suspicions, which justified the policy pursued up to September 8, could hardly have been a reason after the Indian contingent had been ordered, unless indeed the Government assumed that the Boers would differentiate precisely between that portion of our preparations that was intended for purely defensive purposes, and that which was destined to play an offensive part, and would be more alarmed by the purchase of mules in America than by the landing of troops at the Cape. It is difficult not to suspect that the real motive of the fortnight's delay—and the part motive, perhaps, of their previous unwillingness to pursue the policy of open preparation urged by Lord Wolseley—was the aversion, deep-rooted in the minds of English politicians, as indeed in the minds of English business men, to any expenditure in anticipation of events that may conceivably not occur. That nine stitches after are better than one stitch in time has ever been the creed of Chancellors of the Exchequer, in whose eyes forethought and imagination are only due to the evil promptings of the original sin of extravagance. It was the same penny wisdom and pound folly that led the Treasury at this period to repeat its refusal to a request made nearly two years before to sanction an expenditure of some £25,000 to provide certain necessary fittings for horse stalls for the sea transport of cavalry and artillery, the two arms that were most needed at the outbreak of war, and that allowed good opportunities for the retaining of transport ships to be thrown away, the result in both cases being delay. The best excuse that can be made for the Govern-

ment is to be found in the assumption underlying all their actions, that the strengthened garrison of South Africa was more than sufficient to hold its own, and that the length of the interval between the outbreak of war and the arrival of the force that was to march to Pretoria was therefore a matter of little consequence.

Oct. 7. Mobilisation. Its success.

It was not till October 7, when it had been known for nearly a week that the Boers were determined not only to fight, but to take the aggressive, and when the outbreak of war was only a question of a few days, that the mobilisation order was actually issued. The reserves responded to the call with promptitude; the War Office, the generals commanding districts, the regimental officers, the transport officers of the Admiralty, each and all fulfilled their allotted duties with admirable energy and despatch. Lord Wolseley, who throughout his career at the War Office had devoted his special care to mobilisation, could well be satisfied with the result of his work. The first infantry transports sailed on October 20, and by October 31, 27,000 men, 3600 horses, and 42 guns had been embarked. The last transport of the Army Corps sailed on November 15, and by December 4 the 47,000 men had been landed in South Africa. When the enormous difficulties are realised which attend the sea transport of a large army, this performance must be regarded as extremely creditable.

The command given to Sir R. Buller.

The command of the Army Corps and of the whole of the forces in South Africa was assigned to General Sir Redvers Buller, who, with most of his staff, sailed on October 14. General Buller had served with distinction as a commander of light horse in South Africa in 1878 and 1879, and as chief of Sir Evelyn Wood's staff in the first Transvaal war. In Egypt and the Sudan from 1882 to 1885 he had added still further to his reputation as a leader of men, and he had since then held the important position of Adjutant-General at the War Office, where under the titular supremacy of the Duke of Cambridge, he had reigned almost supreme. By common consent General Buller was considered fitted for the highest command. No one—except possibly a few of the officers who had taken part in the Salisbury Plain manœuvres

of the year before—entertained a doubt of his generalship or of his capacity to carry the war to a successful end.

Other officers with the force.

The first infantry division was to be commanded by Lord Methuen, who had led a mounted force in Bechuanaland in 1885 under Sir C. Warren, and had commanded the Home District from 1892 to 1897. His brigadiers were General Sir H. Colvile and General Hildyard, commanding the Guards and English brigades. General Colvile had served in the Sudan and in Uganda. General Hildyard had served in the Egyptian campaign of 1882, but was better known for his work as commandant of the Staff College. The second division was under Sir C. F. Clery, the author of 'Minor Tactics,' and his brigades, the Highland and the Light Infantry brigade, were commanded by Generals Wauchope and Lyttelton. General Wauchope was known in Scotland both for his valour in action and for the spirited attempt he had made to contest Mid-Lothian against Mr. Gladstone. General Lyttelton had commanded the 2nd British brigade at Omdurman. The third division, comprising the Fusilier Brigade under General Barton and the Irish Brigade under General Hart, was commanded by Sir W. Gatacre. General Gatacre had served on the North-West frontier of India, and in command of the British forces at the Atbara and at Omdurman, and was at that time in command of the Eastern District. An intensely keen and energetic soldier, unsparing of himself and of his men, he was generally looked upon as the most likely of Sir R. Buller's subordinates to make his mark on the history of the campaign. The commander of the cavalry division, General J. D. P. French, inspector-general of cavalry at Aldershot, was a mere name to the public, and few outside the Army foresaw how fully the campaign was to justify his appointment. The control of the line of communications, with seven battalions of infantry, and all the due complement of engineers, Army Service Corps, and base hospitals, was to be given to General Forestier-Walker. Supplies were under Colonel W. D. Richardson, an officer of great South African experience, aided by Colonel E. W. D. Ward, while transport and remounts remained under Colonel Bridge. The railways,

destined to play so all-important a part in the war, were assigned to Colonel Girouard, the young Canadian officer whose work as director of railways in the Sudan had contributed so materially to Lord Kitchener's successes. The artillery was commanded by General G. H. Marshall and the engineers by General E. Wood. The medical arrangements were under Surgeon-General Wilson. On Sir R. Buller's staff there were, besides Sir A. Hunter, who was expected to join at the Cape, Colonel the Hon. F. W. Stopford, Colonel H. S. Miles, Colonel A. S. Wynne, Colonel C. W. Douglas, and Colonel R. Pole-Carew, all destined in various ways to take prominent parts in the campaign.

Composition of the force.

As regards the composition of the field force, it is worth noting that the army corps was to be accompanied by a whole cavalry division. To the extent of one brigade, at any rate, the War Office realised the greater need there would be for mounted men in South Africa. To each of the two cavalry brigades was further attached a four-company regiment of mounted infantry. Of artillery the field force had fifteen field batteries, including three howitzer batteries, and four batteries of horse artillery. In all the technical services the expeditionary force was well equipped. There were four field companies of Royal Engineers, the 1st Telegraph Division, a railway company, pontoon troop, balloon section, etc., ammunition columns and ammunition park, supply columns, supply park, field bakeries and field hospitals, with the Army Corps itself; and four additional railway companies, a steam transport company, a balloon field factory, four auxiliary companies Army Service Corps, two remount companies Army Service Corps, four ordnance companies, four stationary and five general hospitals, medical store depôts, hospital trains and hospital ships, with the line of communication troops.*

Foresight shown in sending ahead the whole of the Army Service Corps.

The whole of the Army Service Corps for the force, twenty-two companies strong, including all the brigade and divisional companies, and three out of the four ordnance companies

* It should be understood, however, that all these technical detachments were practically without transport or transport *personnel*, and had to be equipped as they landed.

were despatched on the *Braemar Castle* on October 6 and arrived at Cape Town on the 24th, fully three weeks ahead of the first batch of transports. The importance of this step can hardly be overrated. In the weeks thus gained, Colonel Richardson and the other transport and supply officers were enabled to make everything ready for the immediate movement of the divisions and the brigades on their arrival, and to accumulate enormous stores of supplies at advanced bases before the narrow gauge single line railways became congested with the carriage of troops and horses. It is safe to say that this piece of foresight was responsible not only for the immediate advance of the different portions of the Army Corps as they arrived, but in no small measure for the rapidity with which Lords Roberts was able in January and February to mass a large army on the western border of the Free State.

Offers of colonial aid. Attitude of War Office. Accepted as a favour.

Already in July * some of the colonies had expressed their eagerness to send a contingent in case of war with the Transvaal. These offers were repeated at the end of September and were welcomed with gratitude by the nation. In the War Office they were, however, by no means regarded in the same light.† The military authorities believed that they had an amply sufficient force in every arm for their purpose. They thought colonials would be difficult to manage and little use, an encumbrance rather than a help. If they could have had their own way they would have accepted none of the offers. It was only in deference to the strongly expressed wish of the Government that Sir Redvers Buller consented that small detachments, representative of each self-governing colony, should have the privilege of accompanying the Army. On October 3 the Colonial Office telegraphed its formal acceptance to the colonies. It was suggested that the contingents sent should be formed into units of about 125 men each. These units could be infantry, mounted infantry, or

* See Vol. I., p. 306. Large numbers of individuals also volunteered; thus in New South Wales alone 1860 offers were received during July from members of the colonial forces.

† In June, however, Lord Wolseley would seem to have suggested an appeal to the colonies for contingents. See Lord Lansdowne's speech in the House of Lords, March 15, 1901.

General Sir G. S. White, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G.,

Commanding Natal Field Force, 1899-1900.

Photo by Window & Grove.

cavalry; but "in view of numbers already available, infantry most, cavalry least serviceable." The meaning of this despatch, most amazing to look back upon, becomes clear if for "most serviceable" we substitute the more direct phrase "least troublesome." The question of serviceableness never entered the heads of the military authorities. They were satisfied that the force they were sending was sufficient in every respect. If it was considered good policy to let some of the colonials see how the war would be managed, they might be allowed to come, providing they gave as little trouble as possible. And that condition was best fulfilled by infantry. In the same spirit the offer to send a field battery made by New South Wales was rejected, while Queensland was informed that it might send machine guns with its contingent provided the total number of men sent was not increased. The forces actually sent were as follows. Mounted infantry: 250 from Queensland, 200 from New Zealand, 200 * from New South Wales, and 125 from Victoria; infantry: 125 each from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and West Australia, 80 from Tasmania, and a whole battalion 1000 strong from Canada. These contingents all sailed in the last days of October or first week of November, and reached the Cape by the end of that month.

Universal confidence. Due to the absence of a directing "Brain of the Army."

The confidence felt in themselves by the War Office was shared by the nation, in England, in South Africa, and in the other colonies. Never had so completely equipped a force left the shores of England for a distant expedition over seas. Ministers deprecatingly apologised to Parliament for their over caution in sending so large an army against so contemptible an opponent. Even those leaders of the opposition who had prophesied disaster to the Sudan expedition for once displayed no anxiety as to the issue of the campaign. A few critics ventured to point out that the army corps was a mere paper organisation, that, with the single exception of General Hildyard's brigade, not one of its brigades, let alone its divisions, had ever worked together as a unit, and that its staffs, whether corps, divisional, or brigade, were extemporised

* Including some seventy or eighty New South Wales Lancers who were training in England.

from officers scraped together from every conceivable peace employment. A few regretted that a larger proportion of mounted infantry had not been sent out. Still fewer, in England at least, were those who ventured to express a doubt as to the numerical adequacy of the force. Even those officers whose Indian experience had taught them how helpless a whole division could prove in face of a handful of Afridis armed with stolen rifles, contented themselves with the reflection that, no doubt, the War Office had its good reasons for rating these Boers with their Mausers and modern artillery and unlimited ammunition so far below the bandit tribes of the Indian frontier. How came so great a misunderstanding to be possible? The only answer that can be given is that the British Army was without a responsible thinking department entrusted with the duty of working out scientifically the whole problem presented by war with the Boers and with the power of acting upon its own conclusions. Such a department might not, perhaps, have realised fully the value of Boer methods under modern conditions. But it would certainly have kept in mind some of the difficulties of defending 2000 miles of frontier against a well-armed mobile enemy working on interior lines, or of conquering a territory larger than France with a small force of infantry. It would have endeavoured to study the problem as it presented itself to the other side and not simply have assumed, as the War Office authorities did assume, that a few half-hearted raids into Natal, followed by a single obstinate attempt to check the irresistible advance of General Buller's "steam roller," would represent the highest strategy that the Boers could possibly display.

The plan of campaign. The alternative lines of advance.

In its simplicity and superficial completeness the plan of campaign was of a piece with the army corps that was to execute it. The force was to march straight to Pretoria, overcoming such resistance as it met on the way. The occupation of Pretoria would, of course, end the war. Of the various possible lines of advance only two were seriously considered. The one was an advance through Natal, and the other an advance across the southern frontier of the Free State and along the line of railway from the Orange River by Spring-

fontein and Bloemfontein to Johannesburg. The former offered a much shorter route, its base was in a loyal colony, and, once over Laing's Nek, the country was favourable to the evolution of British troops. The main force of the Boers, in other words, the real strategical objective, would be on that side. A decisive engagement would probably be fought at an early stage in the campaign, and if the losses inflicted on the Boers were heavy it might end the war altogether. The Natal route was in many ways attractive, and Lord Wolseley was at first strongly inclined to favour it. But there were serious objections. The country between the Biggarsberg and Laing's Nek was difficult, and exactly suited to Boer tactics. More important still, there was only a single harbour available, and a single railway line, whose carrying power, owing to the steep gradients, was very much less than that of any one of the three Cape lines. In Cape Colony there were three harbours, and three lines of railway, all converging on the southern border of the Free State. The level downs of that Republic were considered admirably suited to the evolutions of British cavalry. A further advantage was that the presence of a large army in Cape Colony in the early stages of the war might check any desire for rebellion on the part of the Dutch colonists. The chief drawback to this plan was the enormous length, nearly 1000 miles, of the line of communications. Another drawback, though there were few who realised it at the time, was the danger that the enemy, afraid to stand against a large army in the open, would resort to harassing guerilla operations which might involve the breaking up of the force and an indefinite delay in bringing the war to a conclusion. Between the two alternatives the Commander-in-Chief hesitated for a long time. Finally, he decided on the advance through Cape Colony. The army corps was to be landed in three parts at Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London, and concentrate *viâ* De Aar, Naauwpoort and Stormberg upon Norvals Pont and Bethulie.

Boer preparations, May–August, 1899.

The Boer preparations during all this period present a far less complicated problem. No elaborate calculations about the purchase of mules or the sea transport of a large expedition were necessary, for the burghers were ready on the spot

with all that was required. There was no delicate weighing of political scruples as to the effect of preparations on the other side; the only question was whether the points at issue were worth fighting for. The likelihood of war was discussed without reserve at Pretoria and Bloemfontein once it was known that the Imperial Government was minded to take up the Uitlander question. If possible, the Transvaal was anxious to defer war for two or three years, in order to add to its armaments and to perfect its arrangements for a general rising in Cape Colony. In any case it was desirable to defer it till October, when the South African winter would come to an end and the veld would be carpeted with fresh herbage. Meanwhile it was advisable to get in as much warlike material as time would allow. Already, at the beginning of May, at the very moment that he was inviting Sir A. Milner to Bloemfontein, President Steyn was in busy communication with Pretoria about ammunition. By the end of the month the farmers in Northern Natal were getting disquieted by the rumours of preparations that crossed the border. On June 23, the Free State Volksraad voted some slight increases to its artillery. On July 8, 500 cases of ammunition, the forerunners of many others, were sent down to Bloemfontein from Pretoria, and on the same day the *Gaika* landed another million rounds and 500 rifles at Port Elizabeth, also intended for the Free State. At the end of July, Mr. Van Kretschmar, the energetic new manager of the Netherlands Railway, was distressed to find that General Joubert did not profess to have thought out any detailed plan of defence.* A month later, however, the question of meeting an English invasion by armoured train from Natal was discussed by the Executive Council and a site for blocking the line was

* It is not unlikely that *slim* Piet Joubert pretended to be more indifferent than he really was in order to get rid of his bellicose and officious Hollander adviser. The "Military Notes," p. 52, state on "reliable" authority that a plan for a joint invasion of Natal and advance on Ladysmith by the forces of both Republics was contemplated as early as June 1899. Still there can be no doubt that Joubert let his unwillingness to join in with the war party hamper his activity as commandant-general, and, unlike Sir W. Butler, who was pursuing a similar course on the other side, he could not be removed.

selected at Paardekop, between Standerton and Laing's Nek, and arrangements made for blowing up Standerton bridge. Elsewhere arrangements were made for destroying Bethulie and Norvals Pont bridges. The frontiers were everywhere carefully watched, while Boer agents were busy in all the border districts securing promises of armed help from disloyalist farmers. Artillery and ammunition were ordered from Europe in frantic haste.* Of the former only eight 7·5 cm. Krupps managed to arrive before the war. Of the latter an enormous consignment arrived at Lorenzo Marques on August 15.† It was delayed by the Portuguese authorities in order to give the British an opportunity of stopping its passage, but by the incredible apathy and blundering of the British Foreign Office was allowed to pass through at the end of the month.

The Boer plan of campaign.

At the beginning of September, the Transvaal Executive Council, though already determined on war,‡ had not definitely decided to go beyond armed resistance to any attempt to enforce a settlement of the Uitlander question. But during the next three weeks the party of aggressive action gradually gained the upper hand. Mr. Chamberlain's despatch of September 22, and Sir W. P. Symons' advance to Dundee on the 24th, decided their hesitations. The history of that decision, of the waverings of the Free State, of the unforeseen delays in the mobilisation (due, in part, to Joubert's wilful neglect of preparations), which enabled Sir G. White and the Indian contingent to arrive in time and save Natal, has already been told.§ The Boer plan of campaign itself was simple. A large force was to invade Northern Natal from west, north and east, crush the little garrisons at Dundee and Ladysmith, and then rapidly overrun Natal down to Durban. Other forces, drawn from the burghers of the western frontier of both States, should capture the British towns strung along the Bechuanaland railway, Mafeking, Vryburg and Kimberley, and should then advance southwards to help the general armed uprising of the Cape Dutch which would follow upon the successes in

* Twelve 15½ cm. Creusot "Long Toms" and 82 Creusot 7·5 cm. field guns. See report of American *attaché* with Boer forces, No. XXXIII., p. 131.

† See Vol. I., p. 318; Vol. II., p. 68.

‡ See Vol. I., pp. 335–338.

§ Vol. I., pp. 351 *sqq.*, 370 *sqq.*

Natal and in the West. With Natal and the whole almost of Cape Colony in their hands, with 70,000 or 80,000 mounted men in the field, the Boers had every reason to hope that they could hold their own till the European Powers interfered or till England abandoned the contest. The plan failed of all its objects, but it was nearer success than was ever realised in England at the time. It has sometimes been suggested that the Boers would have done much better if they had begun by directing their main attack upon Cape Colony, and thus made sure of their expected allies. Leaving a small force to act on the defensive in Natal, they could have sent 20,000 men down the Free State railway upon Stormberg, Naauwpoort and De Aar, and thus simultaneously threatened East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. The British garrison, a mere handful of men without a single battery of artillery, would have been captured or driven down to the coast, and the whole of Cape Colony conquered. But for various reasons it is doubtful whether such a policy would have ever been possible for the Boers. In the first place it would have involved much greater difficulty and delay in mobilisation. There was a large burgher population already settled within striking distance of the Natal frontier, which only required to be supplemented by the commandos along the main line of railway from Laing's Nek to Pretoria to create a formidable army. The railway from Harrismith and the roads from the Vryheid district would also serve as additional feeders to a force taking the field in Natal. In the other case the whole army almost would have had to be sent to the front and kept supplied over several hundred miles of a single line of rail. The plan would have demanded a centralised organisation, which the Boers did not possess. There were also political reasons against an advance in force over the Orange River. It would have required an undivided control of military affairs, which the Free State would hardly have been inclined to concede to the Transvaal, whereas the other plan allowed each State to act on its own borders. It would have violated somewhat too crudely the pledge not to invade Cape Colony given by Steyn to the Cape Ministry. Then again there was the desire on the part of the Trans-

vaal Government to gain that access to the sea that had always been Kruger's great ambition, and to reassert the old claims of the voortrekkers by the annexation of Natal, and on the part of the individual burghers the hope of becoming possessors of the rich farms of the Natal "jingoes." There were the memories of the successful battles of 1881. The hilly country of Northern Natal was, moreover, an ideal ground for Boer tactics. Lastly, it must be remembered that the plan was decided on and the burghers mobilised at the end of September. By the time they were ready to invade Natal the Indian contingent had arrived. Even if the Boers had realised that the force now opposed to them was too strong to be crushed at the first onset, it was already too late to think of other dispositions.

Total strength and disposition of the Boer forces on Oct. 11.

The total number of Boers in the field by October 11 cannot have been far short of 38,000, of whom some 23,000 were Transvaalers and 15,000 Free Staters. The main body of the Transvaalers, under General Joubert, including the Pretoria, Krugersdorp, Boksburg, Middelburg, Heidelberg, Standerton, Carolina and Bethel commandos, together with some 400 of the State artillery with two eight-gun batteries of field artillery and some odd guns, including three 6-inch position guns, and the Irish and Hollander corps, in all some 8000–9000 men, were at Sandspruit on the railway some twelve miles from Laing's Nek.* In front of the main body, and on either wing of it, were two smaller forces, the Wakkerstroom and Ermelo commandos, some 1800–2000 strong, at Wakkerstroom Nek, ten miles east of Volksrust, and the Johannesburg commando under General J. H. M. Kock, of the Executive Council, and Commandant Ben Viljoen, together with Colonel Schiel's Germans, some 1200 in all, on the Klip River west of Majuba. The Vryheid, Utrecht, and Pietretief burghers, some 1500–2000 strong, under General Lukas Meyer, were camped at the foot of the Doornberg, twenty miles from Dundee. The Free State commandos on the Natal border came from the Vrede, Heilbron, Kroonstad, Winburg, Bethlehem, and Harrismith districts and numbered some 6000–6500 men. The bulk of these,

* See map at end of chapter.

under Chief Commandant Marthinus Prinsloo, were concentrated at Van Reenen's Pass. In all there were fully 20,000 Boers on the Natal frontier. The Orange River was watched by some 2500–3000 Free Staters of the Philippolis, Bethulie, Rouxville, and Caledon River commandos, under Commandants E. R. Grobler, Olivier, and Swanepoel, the strongest detachment being at Donkerpoort opposite Norval's Pont, at Bethulie, and a few miles north of Aliwal North. This frontier was reinforced soon afterwards by another 1000 or so, who on October 11 were still watching the Basuto border in case of trouble with the natives. Further west some 1500 of the Fauresmith and Jacobsdal commandos under Commandant Jacobus Prinsloo patrolled the frontier from Orange River to Jacobsdal. North of these some 3000–4000 of the Bloemfontein, Ladybrand, Boshof and Hoopstad commandos, under Wessels, Ferreira, and Du Plessis, were encamped at Boshof ready to pounce upon Kimberley. North of the Vaal the Bloemhof commando, some 800 strong, under Commandant De Beer watched the border from Fourteen Streams to Vryburg. Beyond these a large Transvaal force some 7000 strong had its centre at Ottoshoop, a few hours' ride from Mafeking. This force comprised the Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, Lichtenburg, Marico and Wolmaransstad burghers, and was under Generals Piet Cronje, De La Rey and Snyman. Its object was to capture Mafeking with its large stores of supplies and railway material and then advance southwards upon Kimberley and across the Orange River. A detachment of the Rustenburg commando threatened the railway opposite Lobatsi and Crocodile Pools, and there was another small force at Deerdepoort opposite Sekwani. The rest of the northern frontier was guarded by some 1600 of the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos, the strongest posts being near Baines' Drift and Rhodes' Drift on the Limpopo. A handful of burghers and foreigners was stationed at Komati Poort to guard the all-important railway connection with the outside world, while some 800–1000 burghers, chiefly of the Lydenburg commando, under Vice-President and General Schalk Burger watched the frontier of Swaziland. Lastly a small commando and the Johannes-

burg police for the first week or two of the war stayed in or near Johannesburg in case of any trouble with the Uitlander population. The British Intelligence Department had always assumed that some 5000 Boers would be required to keep Johannesburg in check. They had not calculated that the Boers would solve the difficulty by the simple expedient of expelling practically the whole of the British Uitlanders, an expedient facilitated and perhaps suggested by the large voluntary exodus which had been taking place for some months before.

Criticism of dispositions. Joubert's hesitations. Final arrangements.

Except as regards Natal, it cannot be said that these dispositions showed any clear strategical insight. A large part of the Boer forces was frittered away on the Limpopo and on the Swazi and Basuto borders, and the error was not rectified for some weeks. The forces assembled to move upon Mafeking and Kimberley were far too large for defensive purposes, while they proved wholly insufficient to bring about the immediate surrender of those places. The weakest spot in the British defence, the line of the Orange River, was almost neglected. Even in Natal where everything pointed to a bold aggressive, the control of operations was left in the hands of an aged general, who, to natural hesitation and cautiousness, added a strong personal objection to the whole policy he was called upon to execute. Even after his arrival at Sandspruit on October 3, Joubert cherished the idea of repeating the policy of 1881 by seizing and entrenching Laing's Nek, leaving Lukas Meyer on the east and the Free Staters on the west to fall upon the flank and communications of the British. It was with this policy in view that two 6-inch Creusot guns, which had arrived at Sandspruit on October 1, were, a few days later, dragged with infinite labour up to the summit of Pogweni, the lofty mountain which towers above the eastern side of Laing's Nek over against Majuba, from which they could command all the slopes leading up to the Nek,* and prevent any sudden

* They were left there till after the siege of Ladysmith began. The "Long Tom" which shelled Dundee and played its part in the Lombard's Kop action, left Pretoria after the first two. The fourth went to the western border.

attempt on the part of the British to occupy it. But that was not the policy of the Government or of the commandants, who were all for prompt and vigorous action. Several Krygsraads took place between the 4th and 11th of October at the last of which General Lukas Meyer attended and at which the details of the plan of campaign were definitely settled. The main body of burghers under Joubert was to advance over Laing's Nek and Newcastle upon Dundee. Lukas Meyer, camped at the Doornberg, twenty miles from Dundee, was to be reinforced up to a strength of about 4000, and was then to wait till Joubert was within striking distance, when both forces should simultaneously fall upon Symons and crush him. The Free Staters were meanwhile to keep Ladysmith in play. When Dundee was done with, the turn of Ladysmith would come next, and after that Maritzburg and Durban.

Sir G. White resolves to concentrate at Ladysmith. His reasons.

It was a hard task that faced Sir George White when he landed at Durban on October 7. The worst danger was past, for the greater part of the Indian contingent had arrived, and the rest were close behind. But even so it was no easy problem to protect Natal from the invasion which threatened it on every side. Not only was the force at his disposition inferior in numbers and mobility to the enemy, but the peculiar configuration of Northern Natal made it impossible to take up any advanced position or line of positions that could not easily be turned by an invading army. All this seems very obvious, but there were few who fully realised it at the time. Among those few was General White himself. From the very first he saw clearly the impossibility of attempting to hold all Natal up to Newcastle. When we remember that that was the policy which had commended itself to General Symons, and that it was with that very policy in view that the Indian contingent, and he himself, had been sent to Natal, it is only right to give Sir G. White credit for the soundness of his first judgment. Whatever criticism may fairly be passed on his subsequent actions, he at any rate did not incur the responsibility of the terrible series of catastrophes that would almost certainly have overtaken any attempt to carry out the policy originally sanc-

tioned. He now resolved to concentrate his whole force upon Ladysmith. Abandoning all Natal north of the Biggarsberg to the Boers, he intended to make the rolling downs and steep hillsides between that range and the Tugela the scene of his operations. Ladysmith was almost in the centre of this region, and from it as his base he could hope to strike effectively at an enemy emerging into the open from the Drakensberg or Biggarsberg passes, prevent a union of the main bodies of the Transvaal and Free State burghers, or fall upon the flanks and communications of any large force which might be venturesome enough to march past him and attempt to cross the Tugela. Critics wise after the event have suggested that Sir George White ought from the very first to have fallen back to a defensive position behind the Tugela. Even assuming as known then all that we were to learn by subsequent experience of the military capacity of the Boers, and leaving out of sight all but purely strategical considerations, it is doubtful if the criticism can be justified. However difficult to defend tactically, Ladysmith was for strategical purposes admirably situated. But even if it had possessed no positive merit, the value of Ladysmith to the Boers was reason enough for holding it. As long as the British held it the forces of the Transvaal and Free State could have no common advanced base, and no common railway junction nearer than Johannesburg, while any advance of the Boers south of Ladysmith would have to rely solely on waggon transport. However completely the British might have destroyed the railway before evacuation, the Netherlands Company would speedily have repaired it, and with a base like Ladysmith, even Joubert would have shown greater enterprise than he did with no better base than Modderspruit siding, and with an unconquered fortress in front of him. On the other hand, the line of the Tugela was very far from offering an ideal defensive position. History has proved the line of a river, even when possessed of far greater difficulties than the Tugela, but an indifferent rampart against an enterprising enemy. In this case Sir G. White would have had to hold a line, from the Drakensberg to the junction of the Buffalo River, of fully 100 miles. With his small

force, he could have done no more than occupy a few main features, trusting to his cavalry to patrol all the rest. Supply would have been a matter of extreme difficulty. The Boers, splendidly based at Ladysmith, and superior in mobility, could have crossed the Tugela in force at any point they chose to select, and crumpled up the whole line of defence or separately crushed each of the scattered British posts. The fact is, the British force was too small to supply an impenetrable armour to protect Natal; it could only be used as a shield to be opposed to the enemy's advance, and to draw his attack till the main army should arrive. But even if the line of the Tugela had offered greater advantages, such a withdrawal was at the time quite unthinkable. The abandonment of so important a position to an enemy whose capacity had not yet been tested would have violated every tradition of the British army and of British policy. In the absence of any authoritative instruction to the contrary, no British general had the right to assume, before the outbreak of war, that the Boers were, man for man, immensely superior to British troops. Again, the abandonment of Ladysmith might have had most disastrous political consequences, and General White's first duty was to do nothing that might prejudice the general situation in South Africa before the arrival of the Army Corps. There can be no doubt that from every point of view Sir G. White's original policy of concentrating upon Ladysmith was the right one.

Question of retaining Dundee. Sir G. White yields to views of Symons and Natal Government.

To carry out this policy it was essential to withdraw without delay the exposed garrison at Glencoe. Before doing so, Sir G. White wished to consult the opinion of the Governor. On the evening of October 9 a meeting took place at Maritzburg. What happened there is best described in Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson's own words *:—

"*October* 10, 1899.

"A little before 10 P.M. last night Sir G. White came to see me. He and Sir A. Hunter and Colonel Duff (Assistant Military Secretary) and I had an interview in my room. Sir G. White expressed his opinion that the troops at Glencoe were, militarily,

* C. 44, 1900.

in a dangerous position; that they could not be reinforced, and that, in his opinion, speaking from a military point of view, they ought to be withdrawn to Ladysmith. He went at some length into his reasons, which it is unnecessary to set down here. Sir A. Hunter, on being consulted, said that he agreed with Sir G. White. Colonel B. Duff also. Sir G. White said that Sir Penn Symons was, on the contrary, quite confident about the troops at Glencoe, and did not think that they ought to be withdrawn. On being asked my opinion, I said that I was unable to pronounce upon the military point; that the troops had been sent to Glencoe, after consultation with and the full concurrence of my military adviser, Sir Penn Symons, who was of opinion that it was safe to occupy Glencoe even before the Indian contingent had arrived; and my primary object in occupying Glencoe was to make sure of the coal supply. Now that we were there, withdrawal would, in my opinion, involve grave political results. Loyalists would be disgusted and discouraged; the results as regards the Dutch would be grave, many if not most would very likely rise, believing us to be afraid, and the evil might very likely spread to the Dutch in Cape Colony. And the effect on our natives, of whom there are some 750,000 in Natal and Zululand, might be disastrous. They as yet believe in our power—they look to us—but if we withdraw from Glencoe, they will look on it in the light of a defeat, and I could not answer for what they, or at all events a large portion of them, might do. Sir A. Hunter, on being again consulted, said whilst he retained his opinion as to the military situation, it was (Glencoe having been occupied) a case of balancing drawbacks, and advised that, under the circumstances, the troops be retained at Glencoe. Sir G. White decided to adopt this course."

Sir G. White's position was certainly a difficult one. It required considerable moral courage for a general, who had only just landed, to countermand a military policy which was strongly urged on political grounds by the Natal government, was recommended by the general officer commanding in Natal, a soldier of considerable South African experience, and which seemed justified by the general view which the War Office at home took of the military capacity of the Boers. Sir G. White was bound to consider the political situation. One who had served through the Indian Mutiny was the last per-

son lightly to disregard the menace of a native rising. Nevertheless the retention of the troops at Glencoe was an error which no political considerations should have justified. Every consequence predicted as the result of a strategic withdrawal would even more certainly have followed a military disaster. And the position of the force at Dundee, forty miles beyond any support, separated by a difficult mountain range, and threatened by the bulk of the enemy's forces, deliberately courted disaster. The Governor and the Natal ministry have been largely blamed for the pressure they put on Sir G. White. But it was only natural for them to state their anxieties freely, and to desire to see as little as possible of the colony overrun. And undoubtedly their insistence was strengthened by the knowledge that Sir W. P. Symons was absolutely confident that Dundee could be held with safety. The real cause of this mistake, as of so many others, must once again be sought in the absence, in our military organisation, of a thinking department possessed of authority, whose studied estimate of the military value of the Boer forces should have held good till corrected by experience, instead of the matter being left, as it was, to the unscientific predilections of individual generals.

Distribution of British forces in Natal

Apart from this unfortunate concession to the pressure put upon him, Sir G. White determined to follow out, as far as was possible with his reduced force, the policy he had already decided on. To this end he concentrated all available troops at Ladysmith, and proceeded to accumulate there a large reserve of supplies, so as to be able to act, for months, if need be, independently of his line of communications. General White's foresight, and the energy of Colonel Ward, the chief supply officer in Natal, thus made possible the long siege Ladysmith was to undergo. On October 11, Sir G. White went up to Ladysmith, sending on General Symons to take command at Glencoe. His forces were distributed as follows. With General Symons: the 18th Hussars, a squadron of Natal Carbineers and some Natal Police, the 13th, 67th and 69th batteries R.F.A., and an infantry brigade, the command of which was now given to Colonel Yule, composed of the 1st Leicesters, 1st 60th Rifles, and the 2nd Dublin

HON. SIR WALTER F. HELY-HUTCHINSON, G.C.M.G.

GOVERNOR OF NATAL, 1893.
GOVERNOR OF CAPE COLONY, 1901.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

Fusiliers, each with a mounted infantry company. The Durban Light Infantry and a detachment of Natal Naval Artillery guarded the important bridge at Colenso; the Natal Royal Rifles, and a squadron Imperial Light Horse were at Estcourt, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles patrolled the eastern border at Helpmakaar, and a company of the 1st 60th, with a mounted section, was stationed at Eshowe in Zululand. All the rest were already in Ladysmith or on their way there. Of regular troops the 5th Lancers, 5th Dragoon Guards, and 19th Hussars, the 21st, 42nd and 53rd batteries R.F.A., 10th mountain battery, 1st Manchesters, 1st Liverpools,* 1st Devons, 2nd 60th, 2nd Gordons, 1st Gloucesters, 1s Royal Irish Fusiliers,† and 2nd Rifle Brigade,‡ besides 23rd field company, and railway fortress, and telegraph, and balloon sections R.E. Of colonial forces there were some 1200 Natal colonists belonging to the Natal Mounted Rifles, Natal Carbineers, Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Police, Natal Field Artillery, and Naval Volunteers, under Colonel Royston, and the Imperial Light Horse under Colonel Scott-Chisholme. Mention too ought to be made of an excellent little corps of Natal guides under Major D. Henderson of the Intelligence.

Strategical situation on western field of operations.

Difficult as the situation in Natal was, the problem which General Forestier-Walker had to face on the western field of operations was fully as serious. The whole force at his disposal only amounted to five battalions of infantry, the two mounted infantry regiments in Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, and a small naval contingent from the ships on the South African station. Regular field artillery there was none at all, and the three batteries promised by the War Office in June were destined, owing to the defects of the transports *Zibenghla* and *Zayathla*, not to arrive till the end of October.§ The

* This battalion had been brought round from the Cape and, like the other battalions of the original Natal garrison, had a mounted infantry company.

† Sent on to Dundee October 16.

‡ Did not land till October 26.

§ There was a Colonial battery, Prince Alfred's Cape Artillery, but by the economy of the Cape Government it was unprovided with horses or harness.

volunteer forces of Cape Colony were not called out till October 16, and for reasons that have already been discussed, no attempt was made to hurry them up to the front for the defence of the colony. They were not actually placed under the Imperial military authorities till after General Buller's arrival. The Cape Police and the volunteers in Kimberley and Mafeking were the only colonials who took any active part in the first month of the war. The numerical odds against the British were thus much greater than in Natal. With this handful of men the British commander had to provide for the defence of a frontier which, from Tuli in Rhodesia to the Basuto border, was fully 1000 miles in length. Of this frontier only the 200 miles along the Orange River and the lower course of the Limpopo were guarded by any natural barrier. The whole of the western border boasted no stronger rampart than a barbed-wire fence. In Natal the frontier to be defended could be shortened and made easier by falling back. In Cape Colony the frontier was the shortest possible line. A withdrawal would only lengthen it, while the enemy's forces would be swelled by the population of the abandoned districts. From Mafeking to Aliwal North the whole of the border districts, and not only the border districts, but Western and Central Cape Colony as well, were ready to rise in rebellion at the first suitable opportunity. The cross line from De Aar over Naauwpoort to Stormberg which connected the three main arteries of the Cape railway system, and on whose retention the whole plan of operations for the army corps depended, ran for its whole length through a keenly disaffected country, while the line which united Kimberley, Mafeking, and Rhodesia with Cape Colony ran along the very border of the republics.

The policy of bluff.

With the forces available it was impossible to hold effectively either the whole frontier or even the line of the Orange River. The policy of concentration which applied to a small region like Northern Natal was out of the question. The only course open to General Forestier-Walker was to hold a few points of political or strategical importance. But, even for this purpose, his force was too weak, and it was only by a policy of deliberate "bluff" that he could hope to

divert and delay the Boer advance, prevent rebellion spreading all over Cape Colony, and save the all-important railway system till the main army should arrive. To carry out such a policy with success required the most accurate insight into the character of the Boers in the Colony, as well as in the Republics, and the fullest knowledge of the plans they had for many months past been maturing. Fortunately in Sir A. Milner, General Forestier-Walker had at his side an adviser who, to unerring insight into the Boer plans, joined an unusual grasp of the military side of the situation. It is no derogation from the credit due to the new commander at the Cape and to his staff for the soundness of their strategy, to acknowledge the invaluable services rendered throughout this anxious period by the High Commissioner.

Distribution of forces N. of Orange River.

The organisation of the defence of the Rhodesia and Bechuanaland frontiers had been entrusted to Colonel Baden-Powell. Of the two regiments, each about 450 strong, at his disposal, he placed the Rhodesian Regiment under Colonel Plumer at Tuli close to the Limpopo drifts. The Protectorate Regiment was now brought down from Ramathlabama to Mafeking, where Colonel Baden-Powell had determined to let himself be besieged. Together with some Cape Police, Protectorate Police, and a town guard the garrison of the village eventually amounted to just 1000 men. At Buluwayo Colonel Nicholson organised a small column, with armoured trains, which patrolled the railway towards Mafeking, and endeavoured as far as possible to prevent Boer attacks upon the native chiefs Khama and Linchwe. The long line of frontier from Orange River bridge to Mafeking was assigned to Colonel Kekewich. Small detachments of the Cape Police were stationed along the railway south of Mafeking at Kraaipan, Vryburg, Taungs and Fourteen Streams, but the only place which Colonel Kekewich intended to hold in force was Kimberley. Besides the half battalion of the North Lancashires, he had at his disposal some 500 men of the local volunteer forces who were called out on October 7. The whole strength of the garrison, with other forces locally organised, and with the town guard, eventually amounted to some 3700 men with twelve 7-pounder guns.

Justification of the policy of holding Mafeking and Kimberley.

After the reverse of Magersfontein, certain military critics denounced the whole policy of holding Mafeking and Kimberley as a serious blunder, and even suggested that political and financial considerations had played the chief part in deciding that policy. It is true that the relief of these places subsequently proved a difficult matter and by tying us to certain definite objectives to some extent hampered the initiative of our generals. But these drawbacks cannot for a moment be set against the great advantages gained by their retention. Apart from all political considerations —apart from the discouragement to loyal colonists and natives which would have followed the abandonment of two of the most prominent centres of British sentiment in the interior of South Africa, apart from the effect upon rebellious subjects and envious European Powers—these garrisons performed an inestimable service to the Empire in diverting for more than a month the greater part of the Boer forces on the western field of the war. The strategical feat performed by some 4000 men, for the most part untrained civilians, in keeping engaged nearly 12,000 Boers is one that has hardly yet had the recognition it deserves. Of these 4000 less than half would have been available for service south of the Orange River, and they could have done but little towards repelling an invasion of the united Boer commandos. It may be said that the Boers might easily have held Mafeking and Kimberley in check with a few hundred men and then marched in force against the weakened posts which held the really vital part of our defences. But those who understood the Boers knew that they would not do so, knew that their hearts were set upon the possession of the two towns, and that if they were checked in their attempts to seize them, they would set aside all strategical considerations in order to attain their desire. To the Boers, Mafeking had always been an eyesore. Many of the burghers now camped on the border still cherished their claims to the farms from which they had been expelled by Sir Charles Warren's expedition in 1885. More recently Mafeking had been Mr. Rhodes's advanced post for the execution of the schemes by which he hemmed in the Transvaal to the north,

and the jumping-off point of the Jameson Raid. Even stronger was the sentiment of the Free Staters about Kimberley. They had never forgiven the annexation of the Diamond Fields. They eagerly coveted the wealth of the mines. Above all they wished to seize the city, which was in their eyes identified with the arch-enemy of Afrikanderdom, Mr. Rhodes, and that desire was doubly intensified when, just before the outbreak of war, the arch-enemy went to Kimberley in person. Whatever Mr. Rhodes's motives, his action in going to Kimberley at this moment helped to make certain the strategical success of the British plans. In estimating the causes that intervened to save Cape Colony from an invasion which might well have left the British Army the task of reconquering South Africa from the sea, the bitter personal hatred felt by the Boers for one man must not be left out of sight. Even after Lord Methuen's advance from Orange River in November, Mafeking and Kimberley occupied some 7000 Boers, while the force under Cronje was by the duty of preventing the relief of Kimberley kept in a purely defensive attitude. The reverse of Magersfontein was followed by no important strategic results. A defeat inflicted by the Boers in their advance, and inflicted not north of the Orange River, but in the heart of Cape Colony, or almost at the gates of Cape Town, would have been a far more serious matter.

Usefulness of Plumer's force.

The credit that belongs to Kimberley and Mafeking should be given in no less a degree to the little force under Colonel Plumer. Amidst the stir of greater events its achievements passed almost unnoticed. But the strategical part it filled was not unimportant. For several weeks it occupied a large force of Boers by threatening an invasion of the northern Transvaal, and after its weakness was discovered and many of the Boers had been withdrawn to Natal, Colonel Plumer moved south-west towards Mafeking, and by his restless energy did much to weaken the grasp of the enemy upon the little garrison.

Dispositions S. of Orange River.

South of the Orange River no such conditions for defence presented themselves as at Kimberley and Mafeking. There were no points which the Boers desired so much that it was worth while holding them in the hope of delaying their

advance. The only policy was to "bluff," in other words, to make a display of force and confidence in the hope that the Boers might be impressed and hesitate to advance. It is possible that under these circumstances the right policy was to bluff thoroughly, to hold all the bridges over the Orange River and to patrol all the drifts with small detachments of mounted men. Speaking after the event, with the knowledge of the three weeks' hesitation displayed by the Free Staters before they crossed the river after repeated assurances from disloyalists that it was absolutely undefended, there can be little doubt that half a battalion apiece posted at Aliwal North, Bethulie and Norval's Pont might have succeeded for over a month in keeping back the Free Staters, and consequently in preventing the rebellion in the Colony, and might have saved the important bridges. But at the time such a step seemed too dangerous. Between a rebel population and the enemy these weak posts might have been invested without a chance of escape, and the whole colony left open to invasion. It seemed better to abandon the line of defence offered by the river and to withdraw to the cross line of railway which runs roughly parallel to the river at a distance of fifty or sixty miles. From there the policy of bluff could still be carried on, and perhaps with greater success, as the strength of the troops would be less known to the enemy and they could be more easily moved about, while if the enemy advanced to the attack in largely superior force, more than one alternative line of retreat still lay open.

Stormberg, Naauwpoort, and De Aar.

Half a battalion of Berkshires were sent to Stormberg junction. The other half, with a few mounted infantry of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, were sent to Naauwpoort. De Aar, the most important junction of the three, was held by the Yorkshire Light Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Barter, with Major Rimington's Scouts. This latter force, better known as Rimington's "Tigers," from the band of wild-cat skin with which they adorned their broad-brimmed hats, was enlisted from colonials having special knowledge of the topography of the Boer Republics, and able to speak fluently either Dutch or some Kaffir dialect, and proved itself of the greatest service during the course of the cam-

paign. Of these positions Stormberg alone possessed any natural strength, and after being reinforced about October 20 by a contingent of 350 marines and bluejackets from H.M.S. *Doris*, with two 12-pounder quick-firing naval guns, might have been successfully defended. The other two junctions were tactically almost indefensible. De Aar was a mere warehouse, where nine hundred rifles protected a million pounds worth of stores detrained on the open veld, entirely commanded by a wide ring of kopjes which only a large force could have occupied.

Orange River Bridge.

There remained only one more important strategical point, perhaps the most important of all. The great railway bridge over the Orange River near Hopetown formed the connecting link between the two lines of defence on the western and southern frontiers of the Republics. Its possession kept open the way across the "Great River" either for the relief of Kimberley and Mafeking, or for a flank advance upon Bloemfontein, while it helped to shelter De Aar and prevent rebellion spreading into the vast wild region of Western Cape Colony, and menacing the safety of the main line of communications from Cape Town. From this last point of view the importance of Orange River was considerably diminished by the existence of a fine road bridge about nine miles lower down at Hopetown which threatened its flank and allowed of free communication between the Dutch on both sides of the river. For military reasons the destruction of Hopetown bridge was essential, but the little place protested strongly against the measure, and as it was considered desirable to do everything possible to conciliate the inhabitants of doubtful districts its destruction was deferred, though the necessary preparations were made. The arrival of a small patrol of Boers in the neighbourhood on October 16, however, gave necessary justification, and the bridge was destroyed. The force at Orange River on October 11 consisted of the Northumberland Fusiliers under Lieut.-Colonel Money, half the North Lancashires, a few mounted infantry, some guns of the Cape Artillery, and some Royal Engineers under Colonel Kincaid, including two invaluable railway companies under Major Stewart. A few

days later the garrison was reinforced by the 9th Lancers under Lieut.-Colonel B. Gough,* and by the Munster Fusiliers.

Employment of armoured trains.

To keep up the appearance of strength, and to prevent attacks on the railway by small raiding parties, armoured trains were continually kept patrolling between the different points. Against an enemy provided with artillery, armoured trains have but little chance of success, while their usefulness for purposes of reconnaissance is not very great. But they undoubtedly served their purpose as deterrents during the anxious month of October. Their power was much exaggerated by the Boers, while the mere suggestion of watchfulness and intercommunication implied by the misshapen vehicles as they passed through the farms of disloyal colonists helped to prevent an outbreak and caused exaggerated rumours of the strength and activity of the British force to make their way across the border.

Position of the natives. A "White Man's War." Basutoland.

The attitude of the large and warlike native populations of South Africa was a factor that could not be overlooked in any scheme of operations in South Africa. The sympathies of the native tribes all over South Africa were on the side of the Imperial Government and against the Boers for reasons intelligible to those who have studied the history of the European conquest of South Africa. It would have been easy for the Imperial Government to have let loose Swazis, Zulus, Basutos, and Bechuanas against their old enemies. Attacked on every side and exposed to the terrors of savage warfare at their very doors, the Boers might have been placed in a terribly difficult situation. But such action would have been contrary to the whole policy of the Imperial Government in South Africa, and would have laid the seeds of future trouble, even worse from the point of view of European civilisation in South Africa than the trouble created by the narrow reactionary policy of Pretoria. From the first the British Government decided that the war in South Africa was to be a white man's war, and so strictly did it interpret its self-imposed restraint that no troops not of pure European blood were used through-

* These belonged to the Indian contingent, but were sent on from Durban owing to the deficiency of mounted troops in Cape Colony.

Lieutenant-General Sir F. W. E. F. Forestier-Walker.
K.C.B., C.M.G.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

out the war,* and that no attempt was made to draw upon the vast military reserves contained in the native army of India. On the other hand, it was essential that the Boers should not occupy some of the rich native districts and make use of their resources, and advisable that such districts should not be the scene of warfare. Accordingly all the native tribes were instructed that the Queen would permit no invasion of the Boer territories, but that they might hold their own border and repel any aggression on the part of the Boers. The Boers were not long in discovering this, and before many weeks had elapsed the various commandos which we have already mentioned as watching the borders of native territories were reduced to mere cattle patrols in order to strengthen the Boer forces on the Orange River or the Tugela. By far the most formidable of the native tribes are the Basutos, who could at any moment have invaded the Free State with some 20,000 well-armed and well-mounted horsemen. Few things are more curious or more typical of the character of the war than the position occupied by Basutoland. For most purposes it was a strictly neutral territory whose borders were carefully respected by the armed forces on both sides. In the enclosing of Prinsloo's forces in the Brandwater Basin in July, 1900, Basutoland played the same part as Belgium played at Sedan. On the other hand, it remained throughout fully under the control of its experienced resident, Sir Godfrey Lagden,who kept up the loyalty of the chiefs and prevented the disturbances which Boer intrigues were endeavouring to create. The Boers gained by the protection afforded to their most vulnerable flank and by the complete separation between the British forces in Cape Colony and Natal. On the other hand, Basutoland shielded a great part of the Cape Colony, while it performed invaluable service as a centre of information. During the earlier period of the war almost the only reliable intelligence about Boer movements that reached the authorities at the Cape were the reports conveyed out of the Republics by the help of Sir G. Lagden's Basuto spies, and

* *i.e.*, for fighting purposes. Large numbers of "Cape Boys" and Kaffirs were employed on the transport and as scouts, especially in the later stages of the war.

transmitted by the telegraph which had fortunately reached Maseru just before the outbreak of war. After the occupation of Bloemfontein, Basutoland proved of great service as a source of labour for the Imperial military railways, of forage, cattle, and, to some extent, of remounts. On the north-western border Khama's and Linchwe's tribes played a somewhat similar part, though as they were much weaker the Boers did not hesitate to cross the border and ravage their villages and thus provoke hostilities; but only on one occasion, in the attack on the laager at Deerdepoort at the end of November, 1899, did the Kaffirs cross the border of the Transvaal. At Mafeking some 200 Kaffirs were enrolled to assist in the defence of the native "stad" which was included in the perimeter of the defence, and a small corps of "Cape boys," *i.e.*, coloured half-breeds, also formed part of the garrison. Somewhat later in the war the safety of the native districts in the east of Cape Colony was insured by the camping of small organised native levies under colonial officers at points near their frontiers, and similar measures were taken with Zulu police along the Zululand frontier of Natal.

CHAPTER IV

TALANA

Confidence of burghers on Natal frontier.

For more than a week the burghers assembled on the frontiers of the two Republics had been impatiently awaiting the signal to advance, and the news of the ultimatum addressed to the British Government on October 9 was received with a general hum of satisfaction in the Boer laagers. Few doubted what the issue of the war would be. Had they not beaten the English army before? And would forty thousand burghers armed with the best weapons money could buy fail where a mere handful, lacking ammunition and without artillery, had succeeded? The more ignorant back-veld Boer looked forward to a few weeks, possibly months, of shooting red-coats, at the end of which the English would sue for peace, and leave him to return to his farm—unless, indeed, the Government gave him a better farm in the conquered territory of Natal or Cape Colony. There were rumours, indeed, about the terrible powers of lyddite, about war balloons and armoured trains, that were a little disquieting; but then similar things had been foretold about British artillery in 1881, and little had happened. The more educated, the men of the "Young Afrikander" class, realised more clearly the seriousness of the struggle upon which the Republics were entering, but they were no less confident of the ultimate issue, and they cherished far higher hopes. South Africa, independent once and for all from all British interference, or at the least, the abolition of the fetters imposed by the Conventions and the extension of the Transvaal to the sea, were the ends to which they looked. Typical of their aspirations is the telegram

sent to President Kruger on October 10 by Mr. Louis Botha, Member of the First Volksraad for Vryheid, and destined soon to make his name on a wider arena than the Pretoria Raadzaal: "May the Vierkleur soon wave over a free harbour." For a dozen years the old President had been scheming and planning to attain that end. By the arrogance and presumption of the British Government, attainment of it, and of much besides, was, perhaps, not far off.

Joubert's dilatoriness.

At five o'clock on the afternoon of October 11 war began. But although a mail train to Natal was held back at Albertina by the Free Staters, no actual collision of armed forces took place till the next day, when the long chapter of Boer successes was opened by the capture of an armoured train at Kraaipan on the western border. Nowhere, from the Boer point of view, did the situation call more urgently for immediate action than on the Natal border, unless, indeed, the whole object of beginning the war was to be frustrated. Over a week had already been lost, during which the Indian contingent had landed. Only a month, every day of which was precious, remained before the troops would arrive from England. But with a commander-in-chief to whom the whole policy of aggression was distasteful, there was little likelihood of rapid and vigorous execution. The policy of the Pretoria Government demanded that the Boer forces should be actually on the border ready to cross the moment the forty-eight hours of the ultimatum expired. When the moment came, Joubert and his force were still at Sand Spruit. Nor was it till the early hours of the 12th that the Boer camp began to move, an endless procession of silent, misty figures, horsemen, artillery, and wagons, filing past in the dark, cold night along the winding road that led to where the black shoulder of Majuba stood up against the greyer sky—a weird opening scene to the great drama that was to follow.

The invasion of Natal, Oct. 12–19.

That same morning the force under Kock, Viljoen, and Schiel dropped down through Botha's Pass into Natal, and bivouacked on the Upper Ingogo River, some fifteen miles from Newcastle. But Joubert's main army went no further than Volksrust. Here another Krygsraad was called. Though

there were no British troops within sixty miles, Joubert feared a trap. The whole of Laing's Nek might be mined; perhaps troops were hidden in ambush somewhere, or might be rushed up suddenly in armoured trains.* To circumvent this danger the force was divided. The Pretoria, Heidelberg, and Boksburg commandos, some 4000 in all, under Commandant S. P. Erasmus, were to march round behind Mount Pogweni and cross the Buffalo near Newcastle. Marching over Wakkerstroom Nek and through the Drakensberg in pouring rain and over execrable roads, Erasmus entered Newcastle unopposed on the afternoon of October 15. He found the village nearly empty of its inhabitants but containing abundant supplies of mealies and other foodstuffs, which British negligence had failed to remove. The flag of the South African Republic was solemnly hoisted over the official buildings. The inhabitants were assured that receipts would be given for all supplies and foodstuffs taken,† and as a matter of fact there was at first very little looting. Before crossing the border Joubert had issued a proclamation to the burghers to respect all private property and do no injury to individuals, "lest it be thought or said that we are a band of robbers," ‡ and though it cannot be said that the burghers, and still less their wives, followed these injunctions very closely, it must be admitted that the leading men on the Boer side did everything to carry on the war in a humane and civilised fashion.

* The curious credulity of the Boers in these matters contrasts somewhat with the general contempt entertained by them at that time for the British. It was some time before the Boers ventured to approach Mafeking and Kimberley on certain sides for fear of being blown up by mines. Even more absurd was the notion which had got into the heads of the Government at Pretoria, that while the Boers were advancing into Natal, the British would make a raid upon Pretoria in war balloons. Instructions were given to all telegraph stations to report any balloons seen, with the result that for the first fortnight balloons, singly or in coveys, and usually provided with powerful coloured searchlights, were daily reported from every quarter of the Transvaal.

† A few days later the Boers set about taking an inventory of all stock in the districts occupied by them with a view to supplies and remounts—a useful measure, made possible by the neglect of the British to insist on their removal before the invasion.

‡ *Cf.* President Steyn's proclamation, Vol. I., p. 375.

While Erasmus marched on Newcastle, the Middelburg and Wakkerstroom commandos, with part of the artillery, some 2000 strong, moved down the Utrecht road and then struck across to the Doornberg to reinforce Lukas Meyer. Lukas Meyer's patrols had already crossed the Buffalo in various directions, scouting the country towards Dundee, the first reconnoitring party being led by enterprising Louis Botha. On the 13th an observation post of five men of the Natal Police stationed at De Jager's Drift, seventeen miles north-east of Dundee, who by some strange oversight had not been warned of the outbreak of hostilities, were surprised and made prisoners. The same day a few shots were exchanged between patrols on both sides. Meanwhile, Joubert, accompanied, as in 1881, by his faithful wife, occupied Laing's Nek on the 13th. So far from being mined the Nek was found absolutely intact. No attempt had been made to destroy the tunnel or damage the line. Dawdling along past the ill-fated Colley's camp at Mount Prospect, Joubert did not reach Newcastle till after sunset on the 16th, preceded earlier in the day by Kock, who had spent the 15th at Ingogo. The next two days were spent by Joubert at Newcastle. On the 19th he advanced beyond Dannhauser, but fell back again on that station in the evening. On the following day the commissariat trains of the Netherlands Railway were already running into Dannhauser station, the only damage done to the line—apart from the futile narrowing of the rails at a point south of Newcastle—having been done by some of the advanced parties of the Boers themselves. Commandant Erasmus, with the vanguard of the Boer force, had meanwhile pushed on, and had reached Hatting Spruit, seven miles from Dundee and separated from it only by the mass of Mount Impati, on the 18th, coming in contact with General Symons' patrols that same afternoon.

British neglect to destroy railways.

Altogether Joubert's force had covered some seventy miles from the frontier in a week. It was not a rapid advance, and it would have been even slower but for Sir G. White's extraordinary remissness in not destroying the tunnel at Laing's Nek and the railway bridges over the Ingogo and Ingagane

rivers, a remissness which no political reasons can be held to excuse. The least damaging explanation is that Sir G. White never realised fully that the Boers were civilised opponents who could make use of a railway for military purposes, but even that explanation fails when we find that after Talana no attempt was made to destroy the bridges over the Waschbank and Sunday's rivers. The one object of the Natal force was to gain time, and it began by neglecting the most obvious measure which might have secured that end, one which would have delayed the advance of the Boers upon Ladysmith by fully a fortnight, and for a month after that would have hampered their forces in the field. Nor does there seem any reason why, without prejudicing the general policy of concentration, patrols of mounted troops, especially of the Natal Volunteer corps, might not by demonstrating in front of the advancing enemy have helped very materially in delaying his advance.

Movements of Free Staters.

While the Transvaal forces were closing upon Dundee, the Free Staters played their part in keeping Ladysmith engaged. Crossing the border on the 12th they moved slowly in two columns, the main one along the railway through Van Reenen's Pass and the other further south through Tintwa Pass in the direction of Acton Homes and the Tugela. Two squadrons of the Natal Carbineers were stationed at Dewdrop, halfway between Ladysmith and Acton Homes. From the reports which their patrols furnished, it appeared that the enemy had descended into Natal in such numbers, and were advancing so steadily, that on October 13 Sir George White moved a column of all arms out nine miles west of Ladysmith.* The country to the west of the town is open rolling veld, as suitable ground for British tactics as any part of Natal, and a decisive check inflicted upon the Free Staters at that moment might well have given pause to the advance of the Transvaalers on the north-east. But the Free Staters showed no signs of taking up this offer of battle, for the simple reason that they were still fully ten miles away. Sir G. White accordingly returned to Lady-

* To support this movement the Dublin Fusiliers were brought down from Dundee by train and sent back immediately after.

smith with his force, and on the 17th, as the Free Staters now showed signs of pushing on beyond his left flank, so as to seriously threaten his line of communications, detached a flying column, consisting of the 19th Hussars, a battery of field artillery, and the Liverpool Regiment,* to strengthen Colenso, then weakly held by the Durban Light Infantry.

White's anxieties about Dundee overridden by Symons.

It was becoming obvious that the Boers intended to effect the complete envelopment of the British forces north of the Tugela. Sir G. White, whose own position at Ladysmith was threatened by the Free Staters, could not but feel anxious for the force at Dundee, in the direct line of the Transvaal advance and entirely beyond the reach of support from Ladysmith. The Natal ministry were now beginning to be more concerned about the safety of Maritzburg itself than about the Dundee coal mines (which had shut down as soon as the war began), or about the political consequences of a further retreat, and the Governor replied to Sir G. White's intimation that he might after all be forced to evacuate Dundee that the political importance of retaining that position had already greatly decreased. Accordingly, on the 18th, Sir G. White telegraphed to General Symons that unless he was absolutely confident of being able to intrench himself with an assured water supply within his position he was to fall back on Ladysmith at once. In previous telegrams, General Symons had admitted that the water supply, which was on Mount Impati, might be a difficulty, but had urged that the Boers on their side could not well invest Dundee for any length of time because of the difficulty of finding water in the neighbourhood—a view of the situation which one cannot but feel was coloured by General Symons's eagerness to remain at Dundee and strike a blow at the advancing Boers. To the urgent message now received he reluctantly replied:

"I cannot fulfil the conditions you impose, namely, to strongly entrench myself here with an assured water supply within my position. I must, therefore, comply with your orders to retire. Please to send trains to remove civilians that will remain in Dundee, our stores and sick. I must give out that I am moving

* This column was recalled to Ladysmith a few days later.

stores and camp to Glencoe Junction in view of attacking Newcastle at once."

The removal of the civilian population and of six weeks' stores of the Dundee force over a railway that might be cut at any moment was a serious difficulty. The original faulty disposition was already bearing its fruit. Sir G. White hesitated so far as to ask his lieutenant's own opinion on the advisability of the withdrawal in view of these difficulties. Penn Symons at once took advantage of his chief's hesitation to cancel all his orders for the move, and replied in a telegram the gist of which was "We can and must stay here." And so once more Sir G. White's better judgment was overridden by the stronger will of his self-confident subordinate, and the little force remained at Dundee with the Boer commandos closing in upon it on every side.

General Kock occupies Elandslaagte.

Sir G. White's fears about the safety of the railway communication with Dundee were not long in being realised. One of the worst strategical faults of the division of the forces between Ladysmith and Dundee was that the line between them was particularly open to attack on every side. There was nothing to prevent a strong commando from the eastern border evading the small post of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles at Helpmakaar, sweeping along the southern fringe of the Biggarsberg and striking the railway at any point between Waschbank and Elandslaagte.* Still easier was it for the northern body of the Free Staters, who had occupied Besters Station on the 18th, after an action with the Natal Carbineers, to ride across the sixteen miles that separated them from the railway at Modderspruit. But the attempt was not made from either flank. On the 19th, an advance party of General Kock's commando, advancing rapidly through the Biggarsberg by the old road from Newcastle to Ladysmith, some fifteen miles west of Glencoe, dropped down upon the line at Elandslaagte, seized the coal-fields and railway station, and captured a supply train proceeding to Dundee.

* A detachment of the Natal Mounted Rifles which was sent out from Ladysmith to Waschbank, patrolled the country between Waschbank and Helpmakaar on the 18th without coming across any of the enemy.

Imperfect co-operation of Boers only partially excuses White's faulty strategy.

It is a maxim in war that you should always give your enemy the credit of intending to do the right thing. If the maxim were absolute it would be difficult to find any justification for Sir G. White in allowing General Symons to remain at Dundee with a mobile enemy more than three times his strength threatening to envelop him. But general maxims are modified by circumstances, and Sir G. White, though by no means easy in mind about the risks he was incurring, thought that he could reckon upon the lack of central organisation and cohesion in the Boer forces sufficiently to prevent perfect co-operation between the different columns, and to enable either Symons or himself to deliver a successful stroke at each of them as it approached. The factors on which he reckoned undoubtedly played their part in the subsequent miscarriage of the Boer plans. There can be no doubt that if, as intended, Erasmus and Lukas Meyer had attacked or invested Dundee simultaneously, if Kock, instead of rashly planting himself within striking distance of Ladysmith, had confined himself to the task of breaking up the line of communications and waiting to intercept the retreat of the Dundee column, and if the Free Staters had demonstrated more actively against Ladysmith after October 18, nothing short of a miracle could have extricated General Symons's force from certain disaster. As it was, the victories of Talana and Elandslaagte, the former snatched away before the very eyes of Joubert's army, and the safe retreat of the Dundee column, to some extent justify Sir G. White's action. To some extent only, for, on the one hand, the dense mist on Impati that gave an excuse to Erasmus for delaying his attack, and the exceptional lack of skill shown by Lukas Meyer's force, which alone made Talana possible, were circumstances on which no general could well rely in making his dispositions, and, on the other, the advantage which the British force was supposed to enjoy by virtue of its superior organisation was only diminished by splitting it up into two portions entirely unable to co-operate. Even granting the division of the forces between Ladysmith and Dundee, it seems strange that while over 8000 men were kept at Ladysmith to hold in check some

6000 * Free Staters, generally supposed at the time to be inferior in military capacity to the Transvaalers, and certainly less well provided with artillery, barely 4000 should be left in a tactically far less defensible position at Dundee to stem the advance of 14,000. If no more men could be safely spared from Ladysmith, as was no doubt the case, it becomes only the more difficult to understand how Sir G. White consented to leave at Dundee a force far too strong for a mere advance guard and far too weak to cope with the main army of the enemy. To have sent another 4000 men up to Dundee would have been a risky move, but it would at least have had some hope of achieving a decisive success. The fact remains that the dispositions of the force in Natal were not based on a single definite plan, but were a compromise between two different strategies, and as such had the defects of both and the advantages of neither.

Tactical disadvantages of Dundee position.

Enough has been said of the strategical disadvantages of detaching an isolated brigade forty miles from Ladysmith. Hardly less striking were the tactical disadvantages of the particular position chosen. The town of Dundee lies in an almost circular valley, some five or six miles across, completely girt round by an amphitheatre of lofty hills.† The camp chosen by General Symons lay some three-quarters of a mile west of the town on the road to Glencoe Junction, and was almost in the very centre of the saucer. Due north of the camp, at a distance of some 5000 yards, rose Mount Impati, a huge tableland looking down from a height of some 1300 feet on the valley below. Together with a long ridge stretching down in a south-westerly direction to Glencoe Junction, four miles west of the camp, and separating the Dundee branch from the main line, it commanded the whole northern half of the Dundee valley. The road to Hatting Spruit and Newcastle ran over the shoulder of the ridge.

* However, Sir G. White's Intelligence Department estimated the Free Staters as over 9000.

† Colonel Villebois-Mareuil's criticism on visiting Dundee in December was forcible but to the point: "Le fait que la position de Dundee avait pu être choisie témoigne une incroyable incapacité: la défense avait dû être organisée en pot de chambre entre les hauteurs qui dominaient la position."

South and south-east of the pass through which the railway leaves the valley to cross the Biggarsberg, the hills rise again till they culminate in Mount Indumeni, whose lofty peak looks down upon the table-top of Impati over against it. The eastern side of the valley is separated from the broad rolling veld that extends to the Buffalo river by three or four hills lying roughly north and south of each other. The northernmost of these, Talana, stands some 3500-4000 yards east of Dundee, rising about 600 feet above the plain, and is separated by a belt of level ground some 2000 yards wide from Impati. The main road to the Buffalo Drifts, however, does not lie through this gateway, but runs due east from Dundee over the col, known as Smith's Nek, between Talana and Lennox Hill to the south of it. South-east of Dundee are the collieries, and south of these another gateway lets out the road to Helpmakaar. There could be no question of a brigade attempting to hold the whole circle of the heights round Dundee. On the other hand, the event was soon to show that every part of the saucer was commanded by heavy guns from any point of the rim.* By seizing the rim the enemy might make it extremely difficult and dangerous for General Symons to get out through the narrow passes between the hills, whether for attack or for escape, and might thus force him to make a direct frontal attack, with every advantage of position against him.

General Symons's over-confidence. Neglect of precautions.

These considerations do not seem to have weighed at all with the impetuous officer commanding at Dundee. His idea was to lie in wait in the valley till the Boers on one side or other came within striking distance and then to attack them whenever or wherever they appeared. If he formulated any more detailed plan to stem the flood of invasion, he was certainly careful to conceal it from his subordinates. His open assertion was that he had no plans and intended to be guided by circumstances, and he lost no

* Although no one as yet realised the rapidity with which the Boers could handle their heavy artillery, it was quite reasonable to suppose it might be used for siege operations, and Sir G. White's last telegrams distinctly contemplated the possibility of investment.

opportunity of expressing his conviction that no number of Boers could venture deliberately to attack a whole brigade of British troops. The taking up of a defensive position, such as Sir G. White seems to have contemplated in his telegrams, and such as could have been found either on Impati and the ridge towards Glencoe,* or on Talana and Lennox Hills, was, perhaps, hardly compatible with Sir W. P. Symons's general view of the situation. But apart from such a step, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the ordinary tactical precautions for the safety of the force in the Dundee valley were carried out in a most haphazard and perfunctory manner. Impati and the ridge towards Glencoe were the key of the whole position. The sole water supply of Dundee and of the British camp was a reservoir high up the south-western side of Impati. Yet the only force stationed on the mountain consisted of a dozen mounted men who were sent up every morning, while the only outposts on this side were a small picket where the road to Hatting Spruit and Newcastle crossed the ridge, and another at the Dutch church nearly at the foot of Impati. On the representations of his intelligence officer, Major A. J. Murray, the general consented two days before the battle of Talana to have a dam constructed across the spruit which ran past the camp in case the supply from the reservoir was cut off, but no attempt was made to guard the reservoir itself. On the west the picket of one company which had been stationed at Glencoe was called in on the 19th, though half a company was still kept south-west of the camp near some disused collieries. East of the camp a mounted infantry picket was posted at the junction of the Landman's and Vant's Drift roads nearly two miles east of Dundee. The suggestion that cavalry pickets should be placed further out on the roads leading to the Buffalo was rejected by the general, as he was eager to keep his cavalry fresh for action. The inadequacy of these pre-

* As a mere strategical speculation it is interesting to consider what would have been the effect if Sir G. White, while keeping the main portion of his force mobile, had locked up say 2000 men strongly intrenched in this position, where they would probably have kept twice their number of Boers employed, and prevented the Boers using the railway beyond Glencoe, or establishing themselves in Dundee.

cautions was not due to any failing of the intelligence department. Thanks to his cavalry patrols and to the excellent work of the Natal Guides, assisted by Basuto scouts, General Symons was kept fully informed of every movement of the Boer forces. It was not ignorance but unbounded self-confidence and contempt for his opponents that inspired his dispositions.

Symons scouts the notion of an attack.

On the 19th, the communication with Ladysmith was cut. The manager of the Navigation Colliery, which is on the north slope of Impati, rode in that morning to tell the general that the Boers were quite close and intended bringing up guns and shelling Dundee camp. This last notion the general scouted as ridiculous, but he took the precaution to send two companies of the Dublin Fusiliers round by train to remove 800 bags of mealies from the colliery. Another party had been sent down by train to Waschbank the evening before to fetch in a supply train which it was feared might fall into Boer hands. On the eastern side the scouts reported that the Boers were showing signs of activity near De Jager's Drift but had not yet crossed the river. To the north and to the east the enemy were now within striking distance of the British camp. The gravity of the situation was apparent to the few senior officers with whom the general discussed it. But his reckless confidence underwent no change. "I have informed Sir George White," he said, "that I feel perfectly safe, and I am dead against retreating. He has wired back wishing us 'good luck.'"

Boer dispositions for the attack.

The final dispositions for the Boer attack were now decided upon. On the morning of the 20th, Lukas Meyer was to seize the heights east of Dundee and shell the British camp, while Erasmus with the vanguard of Joubert's forces was to support the attack from the side of Impati. Between them the two forces would command the whole north and east of the valley, including the two exits towards Glencoe and Helpmakaar, completely investing Symons unless he decided promptly to abandon his transport and escape over the high ground to the south-west. When Joubert's main force completed the circle, the surrender of Dundee could only be

a question of days. Both Meyer and Erasmus were to advance by night to prevent Symons being warned in time to occupy Talana Hill and thus force Meyer's commandos to attack from the open veld to the east. That no preparations were made to prevent such a night attack was well-known to the Boers through their spies, who, amid the general neglect of precautions, passed freely in and out of Dundee. The Boers had every reason to anticipate complete success.

The night march on Dundee. Symons warned but pays no special attention.

On the afternoon of the 19th, the commandos east of the Buffalo, in all nearly 4000 men with a battery of four field guns and two Vickers-Maxims, received the order to be in the saddle at 6 P.M. for the night march on Dundee. Punctually at six the burghers assembled mounted and ready outside their laagers. Then before they rode off, the clergyman attached to each commando addressed them in a few earnest words bidding them fight manfully on the morrow, trusting in the God who had so marvellously held his hand over his chosen people in all their past wanderings and warfare. A prayer followed in which all joined, reverently baring their heads in the streaming downpour of rain. At De Jager's Drift the commandos halted and were arranged in order of march, and it was nine o'clock before the long cavalcade splashed through the dark waters of the Buffalo. It was a black night with pelting rain, and the Dundee road was deep in slushy mire, through which the artillery made slow and toilsome progress. After leaving the foot of the hills which stretch north-west from Maybole Farm towards Mount Invati and crossing the Sand Spruit, the force left the road a little to the left and struck straight across the veld for Talana, possibly with the intention of avoiding the British picket on the road east of Smith's Nek. On this particular night this picket was found by the mounted infantry of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. About 2.30 A.M. a party of the Boers stumbled upon this picket, and there was an exchange of shots. The horses of the mounted infantry stampeded, and Lieutenant Grimshaw, who commanded the post, wisely fell back to Smith's Nek, where the loose horses were recovered. A sergeant had been sent back at the first alarm to apprise the general that the Boers were in force. This message was

received by Major Hammersley at 3.20. The next messenger, who arrived about 4 A.M., stated that the picket was in danger of being surrounded. On receipt of this, General Symons directed Major Bird, commanding the Dublin Fusiliers, to send out two infantry companies to reinforce the picket. While they were starting a further report came in to the effect that the enemy were on Talana but that the picket had ceased to retire and were in a position to oppose any further advance. Whether misled by this last message or not it is evident from his subsequent action that General Symons thought he had to deal with a raiding party, and was very far indeed from realising that he was being attacked by the main force of the Boers.

The morning parade. The British caught napping, 5.30 A.M.

Day was now breaking, a day typical of the rainy season in Northern Natal. The morning was dull and cheerless. The bevelled crests of broad Impati and gaunt Indumeni were obscured in a grey curtain, and great billows of cloud, like the rollers on Table Mountain which warn mariners in the bay of approaching tempests, curled over their steep edges. On this day they were to be the forerunners of a very different tempest — a tempest which, in its ever-increasing din, was destined to drown the very echoes born on the rugged faces of the silent hills—destined to make the names of a peaceful English village and an unknown Kaffir mountain famous in history. But to the British in the little camp on the plain there was nothing sinister in the drifting clouds. To them it was no different to other mornings. The news of the attack on the picket had not had time to circulate — the general had not thought it worth while to inform even his commanding officers—and the force paraded as usual at 5 A.M. The only orders issued from headquarters were that all was clear and that no immediate action was expected. The precaution of giving men and horses an earlier meal in case of a sudden attack was apparently not thought of, and the brigade parade was dismissed as usual. The artillery horses unhooked and went down to water nearly a mile away, some battalions returned to their camp, at least one moved into the plain to drill, men took off their accoutrements and began busying

General Lukas Meyer.

Chairman of the First Volksraad
President of the New Republic, 1884-1886.

themselves with cooking and the ordinary routine of camp fatigues. Suddenly a buzz of excitement went through the camp, groups of men rapidly ran together staring at the sky-line of Talana and Lennox Hills which stood out black and defined against the pale eastern sky. Both hills were crowded with men. For the moment it was uncertain whether these were the enemy or the two companies of Dublin Fusiliers which had gone out in the early morning. The camp was not long left in doubt. Spasmodic rifle-fire broke out as the Boers discovered Grimshaw's picket, which had retired down to Smith's Farm at the foot of the hill. A few minutes later the first shell which opened the war in Natal whizzed overhead and fell in the outskirts of Dundee town. The second was better aimed, and buried itself with a thud in the soft earth of the camp within a few paces of General Symons's tent. The British were caught napping, were as completely surprised as troops have ever been. Then followed a few minutes of confusion, during which the Boers busily plied the camp with shell-fire from three pieces. The confusion was increased by the whole of the transport and the artillery horses dashing back from their way to water through the infantry lines. But considering the completeness of the surprise, and the fact that there was probably not a single man in the force who had previously heard the terrifying screech of a heavy projectile in flight towards him, the troops formed up with steadiness. Fortunately, too, the Boers were using common shell, or failing to make their shrapnel burst, and their fire was more disconcerting than dangerous. But the original confusion was responsible for some intermixing of units which impaired the cohesion of the subsequent attack.

The Boer morning greeting.

The Boers, after the first encounter with the picket, had pushed on rapidly. Leaving their ponies at the foot of Talana the Utrecht and Wakkerstroom burghers, some 1500 men under Commandants Hattingh and Joshua Joubert, climbed the hill, while the Middelburg, Vryheid, and Pietretief commandos (Commandants Trichardt, Ferreira, van Staaden), with whom went Lukas Meyer himself, rode south and occupied Lennox Hill and other heights to the

south-east.* Three guns of the artillery and a "pom-pom," under Major Wolmarans, were successfully dragged up Talana. The other guns apparently remained somewhere near the foot of Lennox Hill, and did not come into action. Major Wolmarans posted his guns on the very centre of Talana ridge, and was proceeding to make some sort of emplacement or shelter to protect his gunners from the return fire of the British, when he received word from Lukas Meyer not to waste time but to start firing at once. The burghers, too, on the crest were all crowding round and shouting, "Why don't you say good-morning to the British?" So the gunners fired off their "morning greeting" at a range of 5000 yards; the Boers cheered and clapped as they watched the bustle and confusion in the British camp. Loud was the merriment when a British battery opened fire and strewed the slopes of Talana Hill with its ineffective shrapnel. But other batteries were galloping forward and unlimbering. A minute later a shell burst in a white puff overhead, and sent its spreading shower of shrapnel rattling on the rocks. The transformation on the hill-top was instantaneous. Not a Boer remained visible. Fully half scuttled down the reverse of the hill, seeking refuge behind a long wall that ran parallel to the crest, or even in the homestead and kraal at the very foot of the hill.† The braver ones disappeared under cover of the boulders with which the crest was strewn, and prepared for the battle which had now begun.

British guns in action, 5.45. Boer guns silenced.

The British artillery had come into action with splendid promptitude. The rearing and plunging horses were hooked in. While the 67th battery unlimbered in the gun park and fired the shells we have just described as falling short of the Boers on the hill, the 13th and 69th, Majors Dawkins and Wing, advanced to get within effective range. The guns with their straining teams came thundering through the outskirts of Dundee, and unlimbered on a knoll to the south

* Small contingents from Krugersdorp and Bethel (Commandants Potgieter and Greyling) also took part in the fight.

† Many of these seem to have gone off to the hills to the south-east, where they could be in greater safety and yet pretend to be taking some part in the action. One prominent official is said to have galloped straight back to Utrecht and announced the total annihilation of the Boer force.

of the town. A minute of rapid movement, a lull broken by the hoarse orders of the section commanders and the cracking of the drivers' whips, and then the astonished citizens were watching the bursts of shrapnel over the lip of Talana Hill. The 69th was the first to get into action at a range of 3650 yards, barely ten minutes having elapsed since the first Boer shell was fired. Within fifteen minutes the admirable fire of these two batteries had silenced the Boer guns, which offered a splendid target against the skyline, and were very soon after withdrawn below the crest of the hill. Under cover of the artillery fire the general prepared the infantry attack.

Symons decides on an immediate frontal attack.

Sir W. P. Symons may have been surprised. But he was by no means disconcerted. The opportunity he wished for had come, and he was determined to use it without delay. He had not the least doubt that his men could drive the Boers off the hill, and his orders were given for an immediate frontal attack on Talana. The hill, formidable though it looked, was not altogether unfavourable to such an attack. Three-quarters of a mile east of Dundee the deep cutting of the Sand Spruit offered convenient cover in which to form up the troops for the advance. Halfway between the spruit and the summit of Talana a small plantation of gum trees and the buildings round Smith's Farm gave further shelter. The hill itself rose in a series of terraces with dead ground between, while a low stone wall running along the front of the hill just before the topmost terrace would afford a breathing space before the final rush. But admitting these considerations it is still rather difficult to explain why no attempt was made to support the main advance by a flank attack up the northern shoulder of Talana. The suggestion was actually made a little later by General Yule, who wished to take round the Irish Fusiliers, then on the left of the other battalions in the Sand Spruit, but was rejected by General Symons. An advance from the north would have taken the Boer position "end on," and would have been completely sheltered from the flanking fire from Lennox Hill and from the northern end of Talana, which proved so harassing to the main attack. Moreover the frontage of the plantation, scarcely 400 yards, was really insufficient

to cover an attack by more than two battalions, and one battalion might well have been spared to co-operate with the mounted infantry on the flank. It must be admitted, too, that if the Boers had in this their first engagement displayed the same skill in the choice of their dispositions that marked almost all their subsequent actions the attack would not have succeeded. Apart from this criticism it is due to General Symons to give him credit for the rapid perception with which he decided to throw his whole force upon one of the two positions held by the Boers, and for the promptitude with which he began action at once without giving the Boers time to strengthen their position.

Dispositions for the attack. 6–7 A.M.

Orders were issued, and while the 1st Leicestershire Regiment and the 67th Field Battery were left behind to protect the camp and to face any possible demonstration from the north, the rest of the force marched out to the attack. The mounted troops, consisting of the 18th Hussars and Mounted Infantry under Colonel Möller, were ordered to keep under cover and watch their opportunity to cut off the retreat of the Boers. They moved off towards the opening between Impati and Talana, and their subsequent action forms a little history apart from the main issue of the day. The Dublin Fusiliers and the Irish Fusiliers were ordered to advance into the bed of the Sand Spruit, the King's Royal Rifles remaining in support. The regiments, extended, advanced steadily down the slight incline, the fringe of the battalions passing through the town sometime before 6.30. As the troops moved by the inhabitants of Dundee presented a strange contrast of enthusiasm and terror. Men, women, and children turned out to cheer the passing companies. Civilians of the Town Guard, moved by the impulse of the moment, seized their bandoliers and rifles and joined the ranks of the infantry as the stream of extended men surged deliberately forward. The Dublin Fusiliers were the first to reach the dry bed of the water-course, where their two companies, which had gone out in the early morning, had preceded them. A few minutes later the Rifles rose from a slight ridge where they had been taking cover and, catching up with the Irish Fusiliers, made their way down to the

river. The enemy greeted this movement with fire from their "pom-pom," which they had just brought some little way down the face of the mountain under the cover of a gully.

In the bed of the stream the battalions attempted to form up and sort themselves. But the confusion caused by the surprise and by the racing to be first at the spruit had been so great that but little success attended the attempt. General Symons and his staff then came down into the nullah and issued final orders to the senior officers. He had made a slight change in his plans and now decided to press forward his frontal attack with two battalions, keeping the Dublin Fusiliers on the left, the Rifles on the right, and holding the Irish Fusiliers in reserve. Smith's Farm and its plantation lay 800 to 1000 yards in front of the spruit. Between was level grass divided half-way by a barbed wire fence. The Boer guns were now silent, but the Boer riflemen had had time to spread out, so as to take full value of the advantage which the rugged crest line of the position gave them. At 7.30 the infantry advanced again by half companies in extended order, the Dublin Fusiliers leading, followed by the Rifles and the Irish Fusiliers. As soon as they debouched from the cover of the river-bed, the full blast of the rifle-fire swept down upon them. The effect of this sudden burst—the first experience of the massed fire of modern rifles in the war—did not stay the advance. The men saw the cover in front of them and they mended their pace to gain it. The fire was intense, but at so long a range (2000–1200 yards) the open formation adopted proved sufficient protection, and the indifferent cover of the wood was reached with remarkably few casualties. In the wood, which was some 350 yards deep, the green leaves of the eucalyptus, cut by the bullets, were falling like autumn leaves in England. But the fire was mostly high, and by lying in the ditches which ran through the plantation in every direction the men managed to find cover. Here there was a considerable halt, and the troops became hopelessly mixed. Hitherto there had only existed a confusion of regimental units; now the battalions were jumbled together and bunched in groups wherever cover from the now short-ranged and plunging fire could be found. Some of the

The advance into the wood. 7.30.

companies of the Rifles and Irish Fusiliers (Majors W. P. Campbell and Munn) moved to the right through Smith's Farm in order to reply to the heavy flanking fire from Lennox Hill. Most of the Dublin Fusiliers moved to the left into a deep winding donga, which ran up the face of the mountain past the edge of the wood, and promised to afford good cover from the Boers on the northern part of Talana. Some of these had now come down to the upper wall and were pouring in a very unpleasant fire, to meet which Colonel Carleton sent two companies of Irish Fusiliers to line the left of the wood. The rest of the men lined up along the front of the plantation, the left half of which was bounded by a low stone wall, while the right half had only a quickset hedge on a low bank which gave visual cover but little real protection. About 8 o'clock the guns had galloped back through Dundee and taken up another position on a knoll to the east of the town. The 69th came into action at 2375 yards from the crest of Talana and swept the hill, while the 13th devoted itself to keeping down the flanking fire of the Boers on Lennox Hill, who had been growing steadily more aggressive and had begun to come down to some kraals and small plantations at the foot of the hill, whence they poured a hot fire into the wood and on the guns. These were easily scattered, but other flanking parties both on the north end of Talana and on Lennox Hill, where projecting ridges enabled them to sweep the front of Talana as from flanking towers, were never properly silenced in spite of the skill with which the gunners directed their fire according to the messages sent down from the infantry in front.

Symons mortally wounded, 9.15.

The artillery preparation was still very far from having brought the Boer fire under, but the impetuous general, standing near the guns, was beginning to get impatient at what he considered the slowness of the advance. Soon after 8 o'clock he sent two of his staff to General Yule, who was in the wood, to order the "assault." The reply, that he would do so as soon as possible, failed to satisfy him, and disregarding the warnings of his staff, he insisted on going to the wood himself to hurry matters forward. Accompanied by Colonel Dartnell and Majors Hammersley and Murray,

he galloped forward under a heavy fire, jumping his horse over the fence into the wood. Here he dismounted and went through the wood, ordering all the companies that were in reserve or facing to the flanks to go forward in readiness for the assault. As the small party of staff officers approached the further edge of the wood at about 9.15 Major Hammersley was wounded, but regardless of all danger the general stepped over a gap in the low wall to look at the position. A moment later he turned round to Murray and said: "I am severely, mortally, wounded in the stomach." Murray helped him back over the wall, and hastened off to tell General Yule that he was in command. The dying general was helped on to his horse and supported as far as the guns, where he dismounted and was carried back into camp.

Yule takes command. Dublins checked on left.

General Yule now went forward and ordered the Dublin Fusiliers to make their way up to the upper wall on the left, while the Rifles, supported by two companies of the Irish Fusiliers, were to advance on the right. On the left it was impossible to do much. The donga into which the Dublin Fusiliers had moved rapidly ran away to nothing as it ascended the steep side of the hill. It was raked perpendicularly from the crest, while its shallow reëntrants were alternately enfiladed from either flank. It was in this veritable trap that Captain Weldon was killed while gallantly trying to pull his wounded servant under cover. Smaller dongas parallel to the main one, by which some of the men attempted to advance, proved equally useless. The advance on the left was thus checked, and the Dublin Fusiliers could do little to help the attack till they made their way back in small parties through the wood to reinforce the Rifles and companies of the Irish Fusiliers, on whom the main brunt of the assault was thus thrown.

Rifles and Irish Fusiliers reach the wall.

Directly in front of the plantation the ground was somewhat more favourable. For 100 yards or so there was a terrace of almost level grass completely swept by fire from above at a range of about 600 yards. But beyond that the ground rose steep and broken up to the wall, affording complete shelter from above and in places cover from the

flanking fire. Even better flanking cover was offered by a low wall which ran down perpendicularly from the upper wall to the edge of the plantation. When the order to advance was given the companies of Rifles and Irish Fusiliers ran forward through the gaps in the thick-set hedge or put their shoulders against it and forced themselves over by sheer weight of numbers. Gallantly led by their officers, they dashed across the open and headed for the dead ground below the terrace. But the enemy had been waiting for this. As soon as the head of the rush appeared the din of musketry quadrupled, and the dust of the open was beaten up by striking bullets, just as if a summer whirlwind had swept between the plantation and the wall. Many of the men, as is almost inevitable in an assault, especially if no officer is expressly detailed for the task of "whipping-in," hung back in the wood. Others essayed the rush—lost heart midway, checked, and doubled back to cover. A few fell and lay dotted across the open, blots of yellow khaki on the green grass. But those who had gained the terrace were secure from direct fire, though enfiladed at long range by the riflemen on both flanks. The officers of the Rifles and Irish Fusiliers, who behaved with intrepid gallantry throughout, at once led their men up the steep slope and began to extend them behind the wall. As they did so the men left behind in the plantation braced themselves to the effort, and in driblets commenced to reinforce their comrades, largely making their way up by the cross wall. As each group or single man doubled into the open, the burst of firing from the hill top recommenced, but the casualties during these rushes were few. At the wall officers and men were falling fast. The Rifles attempted to return the fire; but to show above the cover was to brave the storm of a dozen rifles. It was here that Captain Pechell and Lieutenant Taylor were killed and Major Boultbee wounded. To show how concentrated or accurate was the fire of the Boer sharpshooters, no less than five out of six men of the Rifles were hit on passing a gap in the wall as the companies were being extended under its cover.

The occupation of the wall was followed by a halt of

some two hours, mainly due to the difficulty of getting sufficient men into the firing line to give weight to the final assault, and to allow the guns to finish their preparation at short range. At 11.30 the artillery, who had been keeping up a beautifully accurate fire just over the heads of the men on the wall, were ordered to cease fire to allow the infantry to rush the crest of the hill. The fire from the Boers on the crest immediately above had now died down very low, and Colonel Gunning, thinking that the right moment had at last come, passed the word down the infantry line to prepare for the final charge. In front of the wall was a terrace sloping upwards for about fifty yards. Beyond this the rise of the bluff was almost precipitous; the face was composed of boulders embedded amongst long grass and thick bushes. The infantry braced themselves for the final effort. Then that horrible pause—that moment of mental tension, when every throb of the heart seems to batter against the frame. Then came the shout from Colonel Gunning, clear and piercing above the din of battle—"Advance!" The wall glistened for a second with bayonets.* Then the khaki-clad line threw itself against it—fell in a heap on the far side—gathered convulsively, and staggered on against the avalanche of lead that was loosed against it. "Forrard away—forrard away!" shouted the officers. The response was magnificent—the loss in keeping with the desperate nature of the rush. General Yule's brigade-major, Colonel Sherston, a nephew of Lord Roberts, was among the first to fall. The fifty yards were gained, men and officers began to haul themselves up the face of the sheer incline. Rifles, Irish Fusiliers, Dublins were all represented in the charge, but the greatest share of the credit belongs to the Rifles, who supplied most of the men and lost most heavily. Colonel Gunning, who had so gallantly led the attack, was killed as he reached the crest. Among the other officers it is hard to single out names where all distinguished themselves, but Captain Nugent and Lieutenant Stirling of the Rifles, Captain Connor (mortally wounded) and Captain Pike of the Irish Fusiliers, and Captain

The crest carried by assault, 11.30–12.

* However, neither here nor on most of the occasions on which the British delivered a successful attack was the bayonet actually used.

Dibley of the Dublins may be mentioned as among the first to reach the crest of the hill.

Position all but won. Officer's narrative.

Most of the Boers only waited to see that the dead ground beneath them was reached and then streamed away over the reverse of the position. But a gallant handful fought against the momentum which carried the defenders from the position. Failing to rally their flying comrades, they boldly faced the assault, and, standing on the crest-line, snapped their rifles in the very faces of the British officers who led the final rush. But their bravery seemed unavailing. Talana Hill was won—or all but won.

The following extract from an officer's diary gives a graphic picture of the final rush and of the unfortunate accident that marred the moment of victory:

"I don't suppose I am ever likely to go through a more awful fire than broke out from the Boer line as we dashed forward. The ground in front of me was literally rising in dust from the bullets, and the din echoing between the hill and the wood below and among the rocks from the incessant fire of the Mausers seemed to blend with every other sound into a long drawn-out hideous roar. Half way over the terrace I looked round over my shoulder, and I confess I was rather horrified at what I saw. S—— was close beside me and a few men here and there, but the whole ground we had already covered was strewn with bodies, and no more men were coming from over the wall. At that moment I was hit for the first time, just as I reached the foot of the hill beyond the terrace. I was hit through the knee. The actual shock was as if someone had hit me with their whole strength with a club. I spun round and fell, my pistol flying one way and helmet another. At first I hardly realised what had happened, and jumped up again, only to come flat on my face again on putting my right leg to the ground. I felt numbed at first but no actual pain. I gathered up my property and hopped to the foot of the rise from the terrace to the top. There I began to pull myself up by holding on to the rocks and bushes and long grass with which the hillside was covered. Though we were covered here from direct aimed fire, except from the crest above us, bullets from both flanks were flying thick. About 15 to 20 yards up the hill I was hit a second time by a shot from above; the bullet hit me in the back above

my right hip and came out in front of my thigh. After a short rest I got up and began to crawl to the top. I had reached the crest line and was leaning against a rock when a Boer stood up twenty yards in front of me and faced me. We both looked at one another for a moment and then almost simultaneously he threw up his rifle and covered me and I took a step forward and covered him with my Mauser pistol. My first wound saved me, for in stepping forward I forgot my wounded leg, and as I pulled the trigger the leg gave way and I fell flat on my face. Whether the Boer fired or not I cannot say, there was too much din to distinguish one rifle from another even at that short range. After falling, I drew back under cover of the rock and raised myself carefully, ready to shoot if I spotted my man again. He was gone, however, and, as I was looking, I was hit a third time, this time along the back, the bullet coming out just by my spine. . . . After a while hearing W——'s voice I called him, and asked if he had any dressings. He brought me one. He was wounded over the eye. The firing was gradually dying down, only to bring to our ears what was infinitely more painful to hear, the moaning of wounded men from the terrace below and the hillside round us. . . . I had just taken off my accoutrements and was beginning to bandage my leg when a shrapnel shell burst overhead. We both, W—— and I, stared in astonishment. We could see our artillery on the plain below us, 1500 yards off, facing the hill, but for the moment I could not realise that they were about to open on us. It seemed impossible that they should not have seen our advance from the wall, especially as they had ceased firing for over half an hour previously. I sat anxiously watching, and presently I saw another flash from a gun, and then, with a scream and a crash, a shrapnel shell burst just behind us. There was no room for error this time; the artillery were shelling us, and presently shrapnel began to burst all along the hillside. I felt rather beat then. I didn't feel as if I could do anything to help myself, and a feeling of despair came over me for a while. It seemed so hard, after escaping the Boers so far, to be killed by our own people. W—— and I lay as close as we could under the rock, and below me on the terrace I watched the wretched fellows who were wounded trying to drag themselves to the wall for shelter. Presently a shrapnel burst right over our heads, and the bullets struck the ground all round us. Our men were now flying off the top of the hill for shelter below, and the Boers from

both flanks, seeing their chance, began firing again as hard as they could load. . . . Our artillery had most effectually cleared us off the hill, and if the Boers had been any good at all we might have had to retake the hill a second time."

British driven off crest by their own artillery. Crest finally occupied 1.30.

The shelling of troops by their own artillery is an incident almost inevitable in modern warfare. In this particular instance it is not difficult to understand how it occurred. Just as the assault was beginning the batteries had limbered up, crossed the spruit, and taken up a new position further north and within 1400 yards of the crest. Here the guns immediately came under a heavy fire from the Boers on the northern part of the crest of Talana. Misled by this the gunners assumed that the Boers were still in possession of the whole ridge, and somehow failed to notice even at that short range the little spots of dull yellowy-brown dotted among the rocks of the crest-line on the centre and right of the hill which had crept up there while the guns were changing their position. Colonel Pickwoad gave the order for a very rapid fire on the ridge. The fire lasted for ten minutes and effectually cleared the summit of Talana of friend and foe alike. The extreme right of the infantry attack, indeed, escaped this fire and remained on the crest, but the centre and left came within its sweep. Among those who lost their lives through this unfortunate accident was Lieutenant Norman Hambro, of the 60th Rifles, who, though wounded twice in the advance, had dragged himself to the summit as an encouragement to his men, only to be mutilated out of all recognition by British shrapnel. One act of conspicuous bravery deserves special mention. When the shrapnel of the British gunners was making the summit of Talana untenable for the whole and a shambles for the wounded, a signaller of the Royal Irish Fusiliers leaped upon a prominent boulder and, standing in the spread of the pitiless bullets, endeavoured to call up the offending battery. It was an act as deserving of Her Majesty's most coveted order as any which have earned it in the face of the enemy. The shelling was now stopped, but after a short interval to allow the infantry to get down under cover it was renewed and continued till every part of the crest had been thoroughly

searched. It was nearly 1.30 before the crest was finally re-occupied after a very slight resistance.

Boer mistakes. Incompetence of Meyer. Failure of Erasmus to co-operate.

The Boers now retired from the whole of Talana, beginning to evacuate Lennox Hill about the same time. The four or five hundred men who remained on the crest once the fighting became serious had held their own with splendid stubbornness, unsupported by artillery, without any reinforcements, and without any directions from Lukas Meyer, who seems to have completely lost his nerve and to have been a mere helpless spectator of the fight from a safe position on Lennox Hill. Of their commandants, the only one who displayed any marked courage or attempted to rally the burghers was Hattingh, of the Utrecht commando. Their ranks had been slowly thinning for the last few hours as men were killed and wounded or dribbled away to the rear—many finding an excuse in the rumour that their retreat was being cut off by the British cavalry. Their casualties, between 40 and 50 killed (including Field-Cornet Sassenberg of Wakkerstroom) and 90 or 100 wounded, sufficiently attest both the bravery of their defence and the inadequacy of their preparation. In many a subsequent engagement the Boers in their trenches were to face a much hotter fire than that poured in by two batteries on Talana with far less loss. Even on this occasion, if, instead of keeping on the exposed ridge of the mountain, the Boers had come down to the upper wall, the British might never have succeeded in getting beyond the wood. This suggestion was made to Meyer before the battle but rejected by him on the ground that the wall was too low to offer shelter from shrapnel fire. The commandos on Lennox Hill allowed the whole of the British attack to be concentrated on Talana, and contented themselves with directing a long range flanking fire on the British advance instead of attempting some more vigorous counterstroke upon the right rear of the British position. Large parties moved about the hills to the south-east professing to be circumventing the cavalry or otherwise taking part in the operations, but chiefly anxious to be well outside the range of the British guns. But if a great part of Lukas Meyer's force took only a very half-hearted part in

the battle, the force that was to co-operate from the north took no part at all. Erasmus, with some 2,000 men, mainly of the Pretoria commando, had reached the Navigation Colliery by 5 A.M. and made his way on to Impati. The mountain was shrouded in mist, but the sound of the battle could be heard quite close, while every now and again the curtain of mist lifted sufficiently to let the main outline of the action become visible. An attack or even a fairly strong demonstration against the Dundee camp from this side would have forced General Yule to abandon the attempt to carry Talana. But Erasmus was incompetent and timid, and found the mist a sufficient excuse for complete inaction both on that day and a great part of the next.

Artillery fail to punish retreating Boers. The flag of truce.

As soon as it was realised that the infantry were in possession of the hill, the two batteries under Colonel Pickwoad were ordered up to Smith's Nek. The batteries unlimbered on Smith's Nek at 2 P.M. in drizzling rain. The sight which met the gunners' eyes was a wonderful one. The whole of the Boer force almost, including their artillery, was, in a leisurely fashion, streaming away across the plain in dense masses barely 1,000 yards from the very muzzles of their pieces. Rarely has such a mark fallen to the portion of artillery in war. At this critical moment Colonel Pickwoad, upset, perhaps, by the unfortunate mishap described above, seems to have lost his nerve. Whether he thought that our mounted troops were mixed up with the Boers, or was afraid of hitting the Boer ambulances, or saw a white flag raised by some of the retreating Boers, is not quite clear either from his own report or from the accounts of other officers who were with him. Whichever it was, it was no reason for even a moment's hesitation. But Colonel Pickwoad refused to fire in spite of the entreaties of his subordinates. Instead he sent messengers galloping off to find General Yule and ask him what to do. In this connexion Colonel Pickwoad may have been influenced by a rather curious incident. About 12.30, or even earlier, at any rate while the Boers were still in possession of Talana, Lukas Meyer was suddenly seized with the strange inspiration to ask for a temporary suspension of hostilities to enable the

wounded to be safely removed to the field hospitals. The message was intrusted to a despatch rider called Taljaard, who rode round the north of Talana. Here he met an officer who took his message and rode to find General Yule. On his way the officer met Colonel Pickwoad, who urged him to advise the general not to grant the enemy a truce to cover their retirement. General Yule, however, apparently told the officer in question that he would grant it. Whether it was ever actually granted is uncertain, for the officer never found Taljaard again. On the other hand, according to Lukas Meyer's own statement in a subsequent interview, General Symons (presumably an error for General Yule) granted the request on condition that the Boers retreated behind the Buffalo. But at the time that the batteries first got up to Smith's Nek it is doubtful if the message had yet reached General Yule, who was at the extreme north end of Talana, and, in any case, Colonel Pickwoad received no definite order that a truce had been granted. Whatever the cause, the Boers were allowed to withdraw from the field unmolested, and a great opportunity, which by its moral effect might have had an incalculable influence upon the whole subsequent course of the war, was thrown away.

Troops return to camp.

Some of the infantry now went down to the Boer hospital at the foot of Talana, where they found large quantities of ponies, rifles, and ammunition belonging to Boers who had been killed or wounded or who had turned themselves into impromptu Red Cross men to avoid further danger. But no attempt was made to push on after the Boers in order to co-operate with the cavalry, who were believed to be cutting off their retreat. General Yule had for some time been anxious about the Boers on Impati. He had already, after the first mishap with the artillery, hesitated before deciding to give the final order for the troops to occupy the crest of Talana. He was still less inclined now to impose any further strain on his weary infantry. The men had been out for ten hours on an empty stomach—for General Symons, in his eagerness for the attack, had allowed no time for breakfast—for most of the time under heavy fire. It was now raining heavily; and more could hardly be asked of

them. The order was given to return to camp, which most of the units reached by 5.30.

Movements of cavalry. Möller abandons good position for one directly in rear of Boers. Captures some prisoners.

It will now be necessary to follow the unlucky career of the mounted troops under Colonel Möller. Soon after the Boers first opened fire on the British camp, General Symons sent Colonel Möller the following verbal order: "To wait under cover, it may be for one or two hours, and I will send him word when to advance; but he may advance if he sees a good opportunity." A few minutes later the general sent Colonel Beckett galloping across to Colonel Möller to tell him that he should be further up, that the enemy's guns were being withdrawn, and that he had missed his opportunity of capturing them, following this impatient missive by another to tell Möller to intercept the Boer retreat. Leaving behind a section of the mounted infantry of the Rifles as escort to the guns, the rest of Colonel Möller's force, the 18th Hussars, and the mounted infantry of the Dublins and a section of the Rifles, went forward to work round the north of Talana. The mounted troops found no difficulty in turning the Boer right. The automatic gun which had been used against the infantry advance was now turned upon them harmlessly from Talana; but as soon as they passed out of sight of the gunners no further notice seems to have been taken of them. Moving along the far bank of the Sand River for a couple of miles they then turned sharply to the right, crossed the De Jager's Drift Road in rear of Talana, and took up a position with excellent cover on a ridge about 1500 yards to the right rear of the Boer position on Talana. They were so close that the bulk of the Boer ponies, massed in rear of the hill, were in full view before them. Here the little force was admirably placed. Several courses presented themselves: unobserved as they were they could wait ensconced until the enemy were driven to their horses and then charge down upon them, or they could at once open fire and stampede the Boer ponies, or they might even, under cover of the Maxim, deliver a dismounted attack on the enemy's right rear simultaneously with the infantry assault. At the same time they were in a position to repel any Boer attempt at outflanking

Colonel J. H. Yule,
Commanded an Infantry Brigade in Natal from October 5th to November 1st, 1899.
Photo by H. R. Yeo, Plymouth.

Major-General Sir W. Penn Symons, K.C.B.
Commanding in Natal, 1899.
Mortally Wounded at Talana Hill, October 20. 1899.
Photo by R. Stanley & Co. London.

the British attack, and if outnumbered had a clear line of retreat. Unfortunately Colonel Möller, possibly influenced by General Symons's peremptory messages, and somehow under the impression that the presence of Boers in some numbers on the hills south-east of Lennox Hill meant that they were retreating along the hill tops, decided to abandon his post of vantage and push on into the open ground immediately behind the Boer position. Major Knox, his second in command, vainly asked for permission to open fire on the Boer ponies. He was ordered to advance with two squadrons to the rear of Talana and Lennox and see what the Boers were doing. The two squadrons galloped about in the mist and drizzle and hit upon several small parties of Boers, whom they charged. The sabres of the troopers, blunted by the steel scabbards which one of the many foolish fashions of the British Army ordained as necessary for British though not for Indian cavalry, failed to cut through the stout home-spun of the Boer coats, but some thirty or forty more or less bruised and shaken prisoners were taken. Most of these were tied together in a long file behind a Scotch cart and entrusted to the mounted infantry who, with Colonel Möller and the remaining squadron of the Hussars, had now come up. The position of the little force at this time, about 11.30 or 12, directly behind the main force of the Boers, who were already beginning to swarm down the hills like angry bees from a hive, was most dangerous. But instead of retiring Colonel Möller ordered Knox with two squadrons and one troop to go still further south to the hills which stretch east of the coalfields, while he ordered the Maxim detachment of the Hussars and the mounted infantry to take up a position directly across the Boer line of retreat, first on the Landman's and then on the Vant's Drift Road, he himself keeping his remaining two troops of Hussars somewhat in their rear.

Möller gallops right round Impati and is there captured by Erasmus's force.

The rest of Colonel Möller's proceedings have been well described by one of the officers who took part in it as a nightmare. To attempt to stop a charging bull with an umbrella would be hardly less foolish than this attempt to bar the retreat of the whole Boer force with 120 rifles lined out on an open plain. Very soon Colonel Möller became

alarmed at his own temerity. He attempted to recall Knox, but considerable numbers of the enemy had meanwhile come in between the two parties, and the messenger failed to get through. A body of some 200 Boers had now collected and made a determined attack on the mounted infantry. The latter, though skilfully disposed by Captain Lonsdale of the Dublin Fusiliers, were forced to fall back to avoid being surrounded. From this time on it was a continuous succession of retirements, largely at the gallop, the mounted infantry covering the retreat as best they could. The direction was first towards a ridge near Dr. Schultz's Farm. Here the Maxim stuck in a spruit, and in spite of the gallantry of Lieutenant Cape and the detachment, all of whom were killed or wounded, fell into the enemy's hands, but not before a corporal had rendered it useless by destroying the water-jacket. The captors were a little party of seven led by P. L. Uys, grandson of the Piet Uys who fell fighting for the British at Hlobane in 1879. The Boers had already recovered their prisoners, some of whom they wounded by mistake. The force was now well away from the Boer line of retreat and almost unmolested. But instead of trying to make his way back towards Dundee Colonel Möller went blundering on at a gallop across the Sand River towards the northern extremity of Impati. It would seem that he first took this direction by mistake, being misled by the mist into imagining that he was going back the way he had come. When the mistake was discovered he was unwilling to retrace his steps for fear of being cut off by the Boers, and hurried on in the hope of getting round Impati and back by the Newcastle road. The force had already begun to round the northern spur of Impati when it was discovered by a party of 200 or 300 Boers of Erasmus's force under Commandant Trichardt at the Navigation Collieries. The buildings of Maritz's Farm two or three miles to the north seemed to offer the best chance for defence till nightfall, when it might be possible to slip back to camp. Here the Hussars were placed in the farm buildings while the mounted infantry were disposed on slight knolls about 200 yards off. This was about 1.15. For some time the

men managed to hold their own. But soon after 3 P.M. a gun was brought to bear from the coalfields, followed by another brought within 1400 yards range. The fifth or sixth shell from this stampeded the horses. Ammunition was beginning to be short. Colonel Möller decided to surrender, and about 4.30 the white flag was hoisted. The casualties had not been heavy, only 8 men having been killed and 18 wounded since leaving the position in rear of Talana. It is difficult to find good grounds for this surrender or for the extraordinary manœuvres which preceded it. The position of the little force at Maritz's Farm was no doubt hopeless. But it is impossible to overlook the moral effect of the example of such a surrender upon the whole subsequent course of the war.

Major Knox's detachment returns safely.

The squadrons under Major Knox were more skilfully handled. After skirmishing with the Boers on the hills to the south of the open ground, they struck across to the north again (by this time Colonel Möller had left) and drove back several small bodies of Boers coming from De Jager's Drift. But the main body of the Boers were now in full retreat, and, to avoid being cut off, Major Knox struck off south-east towards Malungeni, under an accurate shell-fire from the retreating Boer artillery. Here, with the help of the mist, he managed to conceal his men under cover, breaking back as soon as a favourable opportunity occurred and returning to camp about 7 P.M.

Leisurely retreat of Boers.

General effect of the battle.

The main body of Lukas Meyer's force continued its leisurely retreat. A small force was left on the heights above Maybole Farm while the rest of the burghers recrossed the Buffalo and went back to their laagers. It cannot be said that the mass of the Boers were permanently demoralised by their repulse. But they undoubtedly returned with a very different impression of the quality of the British soldier from that with which they had started out the night before. Talana created a respect for British valour and a disinclination to come to too close quarters with British troops which had no small effect upon the subsequent tactics of the Boers. From the British point of view, Talana was a splendid example of the bravery of the British soldier

and still more of the British regimental officer. The high proportion—ten to thirty-one—of officers to men killed is sufficient evidence of the gallantry and devotion with which officers exposed themselves.* But the success of the day was marred by the two unfortunate incidents of the failure of the artillery to shell the retreating Boers, and of the inglorious episode of Colonel Möller's surrender. Nor in any case could a single victory change the falseness of the strategical situation in Natal.

* The casualties in the action of Talana Hill were:—Officers killed: Staff—Brevet-Colonel J. Sherston, D.S.O., Rifle Brigade. Royal Irish Fusiliers—2nd Lieutenant A. H. M. Hill. Royal Dublin Fusiliers—Captain G. A. Weldon. King's Royal Rifles—Lieut.-Col. R. H. Gunning, Captain M. H. K. Pechell, Lieutenant J. Taylor, Lieutenant R. C. Barnett, 2nd Lieutenant N. J. Hambro. Wounded: Staff—General Sir William Penn Symons (died of wounds), Colonel C. E. Beckett, Major F. Hammersley, Captain F. Lock Adams. Leicestershire Regiment—Lieutenant B. de W. Weldon. Royal Irish Fusiliers—Major W. P. Davison, Captain F. H. B. Connor (died of wounds), Captain M. J. W. Pike, Lieutenant C. C. Southey, 2nd Lieutenant Carbery, 2nd Lieutenant H. C. W. Wortham. Royal Dublin Fusiliers—Captain M. Lowndes, Captain A. Dibley, Lieutenant C. N. Perreau, Lieutenant C. J. Genge (died of wounds). King's Royal Rifles—Major C. A. T. Boultbee, Major W. P. Campbell, Captain O. S. W. Nugent, Captain A. R. M. Stuart-Wortley, Lieutenant F. M. Crum, Lieutenant R. Johnstone, 2nd Lieutenant G. H. Martin. 18th Hussars—2nd Lieutenant H. A. Cape, 2nd Lieutenant A. C. McLachlan, 2nd Lieutenant E. H. Bayford. The total losses were 10 officers and 31 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 20 officers and 165 non-commissioned officers and men wounded, and 9 officers and 211 non-commissioned officers and men missing.

CHAPTER V

ELANDSLAAGTE

Kock occupies Elandslaagte without orders from Joubert, Oct. 19–20.

THE eastern wing of the Boer army of invasion was disposed of, for the moment, by the victory of Talana. We must now follow the adventures of the small detached force of town Boers, Hollanders, and Germans, under General Kock, which we have already seen established at Elandslaagte on the Ladysmith-Dundee line of communications. It is necessary, first of all, to explain how that force came to be there, for an advance to Elandslaagte at that moment was by no means comprised within General Joubert's cautious plan of operations. The position assigned to General Kock by that plan was the mouth of the Mkupe Pass, by which the old Ladysmith-Newcastle road crosses the Biggarsberg. From that point of vantage his burghers could carry out raids on the railway, harass the flank of any force moving from Ladysmith to Dundee or *vice versâ*, and prevent any British attempt to send a mounted force round the Boer right to cut the railway communications between Newcastle and Dannhauser. The position was admirable for its purpose, but, as in the case of the combined movement upon Dundee, the excellence of the Boer strategical dispositions was nullified by failure in execution. In this instance, however, it was not timidity and irresolution but over-confidence that led to defeat. Leaving Newcastle on the 18th, General Kock with his main force reached the Biggarsberg Pass the next afternoon, and prepared to camp there and await events. Two patrols of about a hundred men each, under Colonel Schiel and Field-cornet Pienaar of the Fordsburg commando, had, however, ridden some distance ahead with orders to reconnoitre as far as the Sunday's River. Finding no enemy

they had pushed on, and as already related held up a supply train at Elandslaagte. Instead of retiring after this success, as Colonel Schiel wished to do, Pienaar at once sent back a despatch rider to General Kock to say that he was in an excellent position and to ask for reinforcements. Kock was very reluctant to take such a risky step, but the burghers were eager, and so, apparently without consulting Joubert, he ordered the greater part of his force, about a thousand men in all with two guns, including 140 Germans, 70 Hollanders, and a contingent of Free Staters from the Vrede commando, to saddle up. Starting about sunset the Boers covered the 20 miles to Elandslaagte by 10.30, a very creditable performance. The next day Kock selected a strong position for his guns and a laager on some heights over a mile south-east of Elandslaagte station, and there his men slept most of the day, while the horses recovered from their heavy night's work. If they had been attacked that afternoon it is doubtful if many of them would have got away. In the evening the Boers held a smoking concert in the little hotel to which the English prisoners captured in the train or at the station were invited, and where "God Save the Queen" and the Transvaal "Volkslied" were sung with equal impartiality—a curious prelude to the morrow's battle.

French's first reconnaissance towards Elandslaagte, Oct. 20.

October 19 was an anxious day in Ladysmith. Telegraphic communication with Dundee was still open by way of Greytown, but it was liable to interruption at any moment. The direct line of communications was cut, while the Free Staters by advancing to Besters and Dewdrop were threatening Ladysmith from the west. On the morning of October 20 Major-General J. D. P. French, who had arrived in Ladysmith on the previous day and was temporarily in command of cavalry in Natal, made a reconnaissance towards Elandslaagte. General French moved his cavalry out as far as Modder Spruit, twelve miles along the Dundee Road. As his troops left the environs of the town it was known that an attack on Dundee had commenced. The weather was very inclement and the reconnaissance made but little progress. But the advance guard of the 5th Lancers succeeded in capturing two of the enemy's patrols, and from them and other informants it was

evident that Elandslaagte was not held by the Boers in great force. In the afternoon news arrived from Dundee. The effect on Ladysmith was magical, and in a moment a heavy weight of anxiety had been lifted from the little station. The first great test had, as it seemed, ended in favour of the British and much of the tension was removed. The elation at the splendid behaviour of the British infantry was, however, tempered with the sad news of Sir W. Penn Symons's mortal wound.

White decides to clear the line. Oct. 21. French's second reconnaissance. Boers shell Natal battery 8.30 A.M.

Reassured by the news from Dundee and by the information as to the strength of the Boers at Elandslaagte, Sir G. White decided if possible to reopen direct communication with General Yule. He accordingly ordered General French to move out early on Saturday morning (October 21), clear the Boers from Elandslaagte, and cover the repair of the railway and telegraph. The force selected consisted of five squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Scott-Chisholme, and the Natal Volunteer Field Battery, who were to go by road, while half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment, and railway and telegraph companies R.E., were to follow by train. The cavalry started at 4 A.M., and by 8.30 the force, moving along the road to the north of the railway, had advanced to the steep edge of a low table-land almost within a mile of Elandslaagte station. In front of them a level plain stretched for some two miles and a half to the south-east till bounded by a group of rocky kopjes. Half way across this plain lay the station and hamlet of Elandslaagte. In the direct front stood a group of tin houses, surrounded by trees, while to the left stretched away the goods extension leading to the coal-fields. The northern slopes of the valley stood out marked black with smoke stacks and pit mouths. The place was alive with mounted Boers. It was evident that the appearance of the enemy on the sky-line of the table-land had taken the burghers completely by surprise. As soon as they realised that a force was upon them they turned their horses' heads towards the hill slopes behind the line of railway and evacuated the settlement at their best pace. General French now ordered up the Natal battery, which came into action against the principal

buildings in the station yard. Two rounds were fired, the second shell falling into the Boer ambulance, whose red cross was not sufficiently visible at 2000 yards. The sequel was unexpected, for barely had the smoke of the second round cleared when two shells from the hillside beyond dropped in rapid succession into the battery groups. Both missiles exploded, and one so damaged the team and gear of an ammunition wagon that it had subsequently to be abandoned. Having established the range, the enemy began to shell the battery freely. They were using a smokeless explosive, but their gun positions stood declared by the flashes against the shadow of the hillside. They appeared to have two guns in position at the foot of the kopjes before mentioned, while with glasses it could be seen that the kopjes themselves and a ridge in the background were covered with men. The Volunteer battery attempted to return the fire, but, as they were equipped with wretched little 7-pounder muzzle-loading screw guns, there was little chance of their subduing the fire of a battery of superior calibre at 5000 yards. The Boer artillery practice was a revelation. With their first two rounds they found the range to a nicety, and for the space of ten minutes their projectiles fell on the lip of the table-land where the British guns were in action. The shooting was admirable, but, not being well fuzed, many of the shells buried themselves in the soft earth before bursting. General French saw that there could be no question of occupying Elandslaagte with the small force with him, so he moved his guns back to a position covering the armoured train which had followed him out, and quickly withdrew his force out of range.

French, finding his force inadequate, telegraphs to White, who sends strong reinforcements.

A few British subjects who had been detained by the Boers when they swooped down upon Elandslaagte managed, during the disorder which reigned in the station when the Natal battery first opened fire, to escape and join General French's column. They included the manager of the Elandslaagte Coal Mine. He was able to give valuable information concerning the strength and composition of the force now in occupation of the hills above Elandslaagte. He added that General Kock anticipated reinforcement both from General

Joubert's force at Dundee and from the Free State commandos at Bester's station. Before this, however, some civilian telegraphists had tapped the wire, and General French had telephoned to Headquarters, Ladysmith, that the Boers were in a strong position, and could not be attacked with his present force. Sir G. White realised that the moment had come for striking a hard blow at the Boers, and decided at once to send out as large a force as could conveniently be spared. He replied that the following reinforcements were being despatched: by road, one squadron of the 5th Lancers, one squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards, and the 21st and 42nd batteries of Royal Field Artillery; by train, seven companies of the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment under Major Park, and five companies of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders under Colonel Dick-Cunyngham. On receiving this information General French withdrew his whole force towards Modder Spruit.

Sir A. Hunter generously declines to supersede French. Infantry entrusted to Col. Ian Hamilton.

Sir G. White's first idea had been to send Sir A. Hunter, his Chief of the Staff, with the reinforcement. But the latter chivalrously suggested that it would be unfair to deprive General French of the command, and Sir G. White accepted this act of self-abnegation and entrusted General Hunter with the defence of Ladysmith. He, however, took care not to leave the command of the infantry, which now promised to become the most important part of the force, to the chance of seniority among the regimental officers, but sent with them his A.A.G., Colonel Ian Hamilton, on whose skill as a tactician he could safely rely. With him he sent the order that the Boer position was to be attacked without loss of time, for he was anxious to crush Kock's commando before it could be reinforced, and no less anxious to see his men back in Ladysmith again, before the Free Staters renewed the threatening activity they had displayed on the 18th.

11 A.M.–3 P.M. Arrival of reinforcements. Skirmishing on both flanks.

About 11 o'clock the first reinforcements began to arrive from Ladysmith—the 5th Lancers and the two batteries, the latter having come out at a gallop with double teams. Then the infantry began to arrive by train. As they came out they found French's force waiting at Modder Spruit. Colonel Hamilton was eager to start the attack at once, but General

French was reluctant to begin before the whole force had arrived, and the cavalry and artillery horses had been watered. Desultory skirmishing had already been going on between the Imperial Light Horse and parties of the Boers who had followed up the British retreat, and whose movements seemed to threaten an attempt to cut the railway line in rear of the trains. On the right of the railway a squadron of the 5th Lancers and four squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse were sent to clear a ridge, or rather table-land, of higher ground running parallel to the Boer main position, and about two and a half miles to the south-west of it, which was intended to be the starting-point of the infantry attack. The Boers, under Pienaar, being too weak to hold the ridge, fell back towards their main position, trying to draw the British within reach of their supports, but without success. North of the railway, Colonel Schiel's Germans, and another patrol about one hundred strong under Field-cornet Joubert, demonstrated towards Modder Spruit. To check this movement, the squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards was pushed forward about 3 o'clock to the base of a big hill, one of the foothills of Jonono's Kop. As the squadron stood halted and extended in the plain, fire was suddenly opened upon it by a Maxim gun at absurdly short range. The direction of the fire was inaccurate, and no casualty occurred, and, the 42nd battery coming into action, the Germans speedily withdrew into the hills, and riding round eventually returned to the Boer main position when the battle was already in full progress. Joubert's party fell back directly on the Boer laager. As the enemy retired, Major St. J. C. Gore, 5th Dragoon Guards, pressed forward on the west of the railway with the squadron of his own regiment, one of the 5th Lancers, and one of the Natal Mounted Rifles. His object was to turn the right flank of the position on which the enemy had posted their guns. This object was attained with but little opposition. The wire fences which enclosed the railway were cut, and the two squadrons crossed to the east. Here they were discovered by the Boer gunners on the ridge, and for a short period they were exposed to a well-directed shell-fire. Major Gore then retired them to cover in the vicinity of Elands-

w. Elandslaagte w. Elandslaagte. w. Elandslaagte Wounded Jan. 6, 1900 killed Nov. 3, 1899.

Doctor Davies | **Col. Wools Sampson** w. Elandslaagte. | Col. Scott Chisholme, killed Elandslaagte | Major Karri Davies. | Capt. Knapp, killed in Ladysmith. | Lieut Donaldson, Quartermaster.

Lieut. Forbes w Elandslaagte | Lieut. Huntley | Capt. Fowler | Lieut. Cresswell | Lieut. Shore, w. Elandslaagte

OFFICERS OF THE IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE.

From Photo by Nicholls, Johannesburg.

laagte station in readiness to take up the pursuit whenever required, and the Boer gunners, having a more direct menace to their front in the advance of the British infantry, changed the direction of their fire.

The Boer position.

About 3 o'clock in the afternoon all the reinforcements had arrived, and though but few hours of daylight remained, General French determined to attack the enemy's position above Elandslaagte. The field of operations may well be described at this point. The level veld south of Elandslaagte station is encircled by an irregular horseshoe of higher ground, two and a half to three miles across, and nearly four miles deep from heel to toe. The toe of the horseshoe faces south, and is broad and low, so low as to be hardly distinguishable at its eastern end from the level plain on both sides of it; while the ends which run at right angles to the railway, which they approach to within 2000 yards, are higher, especially the eastern one, which forms the most prominent object south of the railway for some miles round. It is this eastern arm which the Boers had selected as their main position. Rising gradually from the toe up to a final kopje some 300 ft. or more above the level of the veld, it formed a long hogsback ridge, steep on its inner face, but several hundred yards wide on top, and sloping down more gently to the east. Strewn with boulders and cross-barred by smaller ridges and dips affording a successive series of defensive positions, this hogsback was a formidable object to attack. At its north end it dropped suddenly to rise again to a slightly lower rounded hill. Behind the nek thus formed was a steep conical hill, and in the depression between the end of the hogsback and the two kopjes lay the Boer laager. Their two guns were placed just in front of the northern summit of the hogsback. The other arm of the horseshoe was the ridge or table-land which has been described just above as the intended starting-point of the infantry attack.

Ian Hamilton addresses his men. The artillery preparation. The battle opens 4 P.M.

The mounted troops had already cleared this ridge, and the infantry now began to advance towards it. While they were still in quarter column, before starting off, Colonel Hamilton addressed them in a few stirring words. He told them what manner of enemy they had come out to fight,

then, pointing towards the distant ridge, he explained how he intended to attack and what he expected his men to do, ending with the confident assertion that he knew they would "shift" the Boers from their hills before sunset, and that the little newsboys in the streets of London would be calling out the glad tidings of victory next morning. The men cheered and cheered, waving their helmets, and running out of the ranks and crying, "We'll do it, sir! We'll do it!" It was a wonderful scene, not easily forgotten by those who took part in it. Fired by their commander's words, and with a clear idea of what they were called upon to do, the men now advanced. As they approached the first ridge, Colonel Hamilton diverted the Devons to its northern end, letting the Manchesters advance further along to the right, and keeping the Gordons in reserve between the other two. As soon as the leading companies appeared on the exposed plateau of the ridge, the Boer guns opened with common shell. Again the ranging was good but the fire was ineffective. At 4 P.M. the 21st Field Battery galloped up on the left of the Manchesters, and came into action in the open against the enemy's artillery at 4400 yards. For six minutes the enemy returned the fire, laying their guns with great accuracy on the battery in action, but as soon as the 42nd galloped up and unlimbered the enemy ceased firing. But the position of their guns stood declared, and the artillery preparation for the attack now begun. The batteries were at first annoyed by a long range rifle-fire from Pienaar's men, who still clung to the low ground near what, for description's sake, has been called the toe of the horseshoe. The guns were turned on to them and quickly cleared them off, but not before Captain Campbell, R.A., and several men were wounded. Somewhat later, parties of mounted Boers were seen galloping southwards along the front of their position, and apparently endeavouring to leave the field. They were pursued by the squadron of the 5th Lancers and Imperial Light Horse* on that flank. It is not clear how far this flight was real—many of the Boers certainly made off when they found that a serious encounter was in prospect—or merely feigned to draw the cavalry into an

* Four squadrons; the fifth remained as escort with the guns.

ambush. Shortly before this Sir George White and his staff arrived upon the high ground in rear of the British guns. Sir George remained till nearly the end of the engagement, though without relieving General French from the direction of the operations, and rode back to Ladysmith in the dark. The scene during the short artillery preparation was a weird and fantastic prelude to the battle. A huge bank of thunder-cloud formed a background to the Boer position, a dense pall of cloud fringed with the light of a setting sun. So dark was this background that every puff of bursting shrapnel showed distinctly to the naked eye. Ever and anon a blinding lightning flash would momentarily chase the gloom away, causing the saw-edge limits of the ridge to stand out sharp and clear against the evening sky. The detonation of the guns, the crashing of the bursting shells, and the turmoil of galloping wagons seemed in harmony with the peals of thunder which at intervals dwarfed the din of battle. But the light was failing, night being hastened by the gathering storm-clouds, and after one brief half hour of artillery preparation orders were conveyed to Colonel Hamilton to set his infantry machine in motion.

The Devons' frontal advance. Their extended formation. 4.30–5 P.M.

Colonel Hamilton's dispositions were admirably simple :— The Devons were ordered to advance across the open veld, directly against the front of the Boer position, while the half battalion of Manchesters, supported by the five companies of Gordons, was to work round to the right on to the enemy's left flank. Once within effective rifle range the Devons were to content themselves by holding the enemy while the flank attack forced its way along the summit of the ridge towards the enemy's gun positions. When the right moment came both attacks were to be driven home together. The two batteries of field artillery were to support the infantry advance, moving in to closer ranges as the attack developed. The advance of the Devons across an absolutely open plain commanded by the enemy's position gave Colonel Hamilton an opportunity for putting to the test of practice the conviction implanted in his mind by the experiences of the Tirah campaign. He had already, in the little spare time available since the arrival of troops at Ladysmith, practised his brigade

in extended formations unknown to the cramped confines and archaic tactics of Aldershot. He now ordered Major Park to draw up his battalion in a formation hitherto unprecedented in European warfare. Three companies in the firing line were to extend over a front of 1000 yards,* while scouts, firing line, supports, and reserves were each to be separated by 450 yards, thus giving the seven companies a depth of about a mile. As soon as the firing line was well over the northern shoulder of the plateau, and descending into the plain, the enemy's guns reopened. They found the advancing companies with shrapnel, but two guns could do little against so scattered a target. The missiles went high or, with extraordinary precision, burst in the intervals between companies. Three men only were hit. When the battalion had advanced to about 1200 yards from the position, Major Park, who commanded throughout with great coolness, halted and opened fire. The only cover available was to be found in the ant heaps, eighteen inches or more in height and as hard as sunbaked brick, with which the plain abounded. The Devons now came under a severe rifle-fire, but nothing could surpass the steadiness with which this west country corps behaved. It had the admiration of all that day; its advance throughout was slow, deliberate and irresistible. After a few volleys the firing line was reinforced from the supports, and again steadily advanced. Though men now began to drop, and the air whistled with Mauser bullets, there was no sign of streakiness, and though there was no cover the men stepped on undaunted until, about 5 P.M., they were within 800 yards of the summit of the hill. The fading light, the dull khaki of their uniforms, and their wide extension saved them from the slaughter that one imagined must be in store for them, as they lay at the bottom of the depression, waiting for the flank attack to develop. Here, with the guns thundering above them, and the soil round them torn with incessant rifle-fire, they lay for over half an hour waiting for the moment when the advance should sound.

* The actual extension, as a matter of fact, was a little less, perhaps not more than 700 yards. At Aldershot the frontage for seven companies would have been about 225 yards. On the Continent even less.

The flank attack. Manchesters, Gordons and Light Horse carry the ridge. 4.30–5.30 P.M.

While the Devons were lying in the valley taking advantage of what cover the ant heaps could afford, the flank attack on the enemy's left developed rapidly. The Manchesters had moved past the batteries, which now advanced straight to their front to a range of 3200 yards, and again silenced, though only temporarily, the plucky gunners on the hill. As the Manchesters, supported by the Gordons, rounded the bend of the horseshoe and faced northwards, they were welcomed by a fierce fire from Pienaar's men, who had already given the artillery such trouble, and who now, in face of superior numbers, retired on their main position. As the infantry reached the foot of the ridge, the storm, which had been threatening so long, burst, and in a few moments the tropical downpour had drenched every one to the skin. The shower was sharp and short, but it gave perfect cover, and by the time it was over the men were among the stones which strewed the crest of the ridge. Here they were joined by the Imperial Light Horse, who, burning with eagerness to take part in the storming of the Boer position, had dismounted and, doubling forward, now extended on the right of the Manchesters. Still further to the right and some way to the south-east Captain Parker's squadron of the 5th Lancers watched the flank and waited for their opportunity to take up the pursuit.* The men were now well athwart the enemy's flank and were in position to sweep north-westwards across the plateau. Dropping shots were falling about them, a couple of men were hit, a third shot dead, and then the Gordons were into the firing-line and filling up the gaps in the line of the Manchester Regiment and the Light Horse. There was a short stretch of level grass to cross, bare of all shelter and swept by a furious fire, then a saving dip, with a climb up again to the main plateau of the ridge. Cheerily the men responded to their officers, and wave after wave of kilts and khaki swept up to the skyline. Here they wavered and dropped, for of the leading sections only one in four could pass. A moment they checked — dead, wounded, and quick seemed sandwiched

* As the Boers retreated northwards this opportunity never came, and the squadron bivouacked out on the veld

together amongst the boulders. And then all were over, but not all, for a score of stout frames lay tumbled among the clefts of the rain-washed stones. And when the dip was passed, what a task lay before them! They were called to face half a mile of rough, rock-strewn open, sloping upwards like a glacis, full of the enemy's sharpshooters and intersected at intervals with barbed wire fences. The far summit of the ridge commanded it from end to end as a butt would command a rifle-range. No enemy was visible, but all could feel that that final kopje was alive with small-bore rifles. Stumbling forward among the stones, blundering over the bodies of their comrades as they fell before them, the men pressed on. It had ceased to be a moment for regimental commanders. Even sections could scarcely keep together; it was the sheer courage of the individual alone which carried the line on. Men stopped, lay under stones and fired, were shot as they lay, or rose from cover to rush another dozen yards. Men and officers fell in batches as they crowded together at the gaps in the fences. But here in places the rain of bullets had done the work of wire-cutters. More than half way was won, and yet, though the summit of the kopje seemed one continued burst of shrapnel, the fire from it in no wise slackened. Schiel and a handful of his Germans had come up by the farm behind the ridge and made a right gallant attempt at a flank attack. The Light Horsemen shot them down almost to a man as they fearlessly attempted to cross the open. But the diversion put a new heart into the defenders, who, though now beginning to lose more heavily, contested every handsbreadth of the ridge with a stubbornness scarcely less admirable than the gallantry of the advance. It seemed as if our men had done all that could be done. Colonel Dick-Cunyngham was lying wounded in two places. Half the officers of the Gordon Highlanders were dead or disabled. Colonel Curran and many officers of the Manchesters had been wounded leading across the dip. Major Sampson of the Light Horse lay on the far side of the dip with a bullet through his thigh. The level crest seemed strewn with countless casualties. Ian Hamilton, who had

galloped across from the Devons, came up into the firing line with a strong reinforcement of men whom he and his staff had swept together from those who were hanging back behind the fences, or under the lee of sheltering rocks, men whose hearts had failed them at the critical moment but who only lacked just that word of encouragement which can make the craven a hero. It was to be victory now or never! Colonel Hamilton ordered a bugler to sound the "charge." Out rang the bugle—such buglers as were unhurt took up the note; Drum-Major Lawrence, of the Gordon Highlanders, rushed out into the open and headed the line, playing the fateful call. The sound of the Devonshire bugles came up from the valley bottom, and the persistent rhythm of their firing gave heart to the flank attack. Waves of glittering bayonets danced forward in the twilight. The Boers' hearts failed them at the sight, and they began streaming down the reverse of the position. A mere handful of determined men still held the final kopje. Again the bugles sounded the "advance," and with a great rush the cheering, yelling crowd surged on to the final kopje, over it, and into the still smoking guns, which the Boer gunners with magnificent oblivion to all but the task in front of them served till the steel was almost at their breasts.*

The Boer counter-attack. Gallantry of the Light Horse. The Devons' final charge. 5.30–5.45.

Down in the laager over the col some half dozen men stood holding a flag of truce prominently before them. Colonel Hamilton ordered the "cease fire" to be sounded. For a

* The gallantry of the Boer gunners at Elandslaagte, and of their officers, adjutants Smit and Erasmus, deserves recognition. They were opposed, on the open hillside, to six times their weight of artillery, but though often temporarily silenced they never abandoned their guns and continued to serve them at short ranges up to the very last, even returning with the counter-charge to fire case at the Devons. At Talana and in almost all subsequent engagements in which the Boers were worsted, they removed their artillery long before an assault was pushed home. It may be that at Elandslaagte the gunners were confident that the position could not be carried by assault so late in the evening, especially as from where they were they hardly realised how close the flank attack had come, or that, as one of their prisoner officers remarked, "there was no room for retreat; the extended files of the Manchester Regiment (and Imperial Light Horse—Ed.), overlapping the reverse of the kopje, swept the northern footpath, while the rain of shrapnel destroyed every living thing on the western slopes."

moment there was a complete lull in the action, and men began walking down to the camp. Suddenly there was a shot, followed by a perfect blaze of fire as some forty or fifty Boers, who had lain unseen below the rear of the crest, dashed up the steep slope on the right and emptied their magazines point-blank into the soldiers crowded on the top. General Kock himself, in black frock coat and black hat, was at their head, and conspicuous among them was the towering form of Field-Cornet Pretorius. Simultaneously a fierce gust of bullets swept across the ridge from the rounded hill beyond the laager. The men, perplexed by the "cease fire" and staggered by the sudden fury of the attack, fell back a hundred yards, uncovering the captured guns, which the leading Boers laid hold of. A handful of heroic Boer gunners even leapt up from somewhere, charged one of the guns with case and fired a few rounds wildly at the Devons advancing up the front of the hill. It seemed as if all was up, as if the position so hardly won was to be abandoned again. Ian Hamilton sprang forward, shouting wildly to his men that the guns were coming up to help.* Lieutenant Meiklejohn,† of the Gordons, rushed to the front rallying the disconcerted groups, until he fell desperately wounded in half a dozen places. Brooke and Laycock, Hamilton's and French's A.D.C.'s, and other officers of the Gordons and Manchesters, manfully strove to prevent a panic. French himself was up in the infantry line driving back the waverers. And now the Light Horse, on the right of the wavering infantry, had the opportunity for which they had longed, for which each man of them had joined. In front of them were the men who stood for all that they resented most—the governing oligarchy that had ruled their daily lives; the Hollanders and Germans fostered for their enmity to the Englishmen of the Rand. For nearly four years since the Raid they had

* For his conduct in rallying the men Colonel Hamilton was recommended by General French for the Victoria Cross, and would no doubt have received it if it had not been considered inadvisable to set a precedent by conferring a decoration for purely personal valour on an officer in the position of a brigadier.

† For his conduct on this occasion, Lieutenant Meiklejohn received the Victoria Cross.

endured the sneer that followed every reference to their share in that event. How could they return to Johannesburg if now, in their first fight, in the very hour of victory, they showed themselves inferior to the men whose braggart arrogance they had sworn to humble? Scott-Chisholme, their colonel, who had led waving his silk scarf to his men, had been the first victim of the counter attack. He had stopped to bind up a wounded trooper, and was shot in the leg and immediately afterwards through the lungs. A third shot pierced his brain as they helped him back to cover. His last words, "My fellows are doing well," were not forgotten by the gallant corps he trained and led to their first victory. Officers and men alike leapt forward, rallying each other, rallying the infantry with whom they were intermingled. Johnstone, Mullins, Brabant *—to mention but a few of the names—waved the men on to the charge. Once more the swaying line began to move forward, but before they had recovered the ground they had lost, a line of helmeted heads appeared over the edge of the slope on the left and, with a splendid dash, Lieutenant Field, at the head of his company of Devons, was into the battery with the bayonet. It is necessary to explain that as the flank attack had pushed its way along the ridge the Devons and the field batteries had both moved up to closer range, the frontal attack resting within 350 yards of the enemy, before making the final assault, the gunners firing shrapnel at 2200 yards. Then four companies of the Devons had stormed the detached hill on the left, while the three leading companies had rushed up the slope to the main crest, arriving just in time to finally overthrow the enemy's brief but desperate counter-attack. Devons, Manchesters, Highlanders, and Light Horsemen met and dashed for the laager in the dip below. It was a wild three minutes; men were shouting "Majuba!" Then in honest cadence the "cease fire" sounded, the pipes of the Gordons skirled the regimental quick step.

A number of Boers had already surrendered when the

The cavalry charge home. 5.45–6 P.M.

* Captains C. H. Mullins and R. Johnstone received the Victoria Cross for this. Lieutenant A. Brabant, eldest son of General Brabant, was killed in the sortie of November 3, a fortnight later.

crest had first been rushed. Others surrendered now, but the mass of them mounted their ponies and rode northwards across the veld in order to strike the Newcastle Road. It was now after half-past five and already dusk, but just before darkness became supreme the mass of Boer fugitives were overtaken by the 5th Dragoon Guards and 5th Lancers, who had been kept in leash for this purpose. Their work was simple, and the infantry success on the hill-top was rendered complete by a cavalry pursuit pressed home as far as the light allowed. Major Gore had placed his two squadrons, after he had withdrawn them out of range of the Boer gunners, within a fold of the veld, from which it was possible to observe the whole of the rear of the enemy's position. With glasses the movements of the Boer reserves were visible, also the effect of British shrapnel fire. Only once was a force detached to oppose the cavalry. About fifty men came down a spur of the hill; but these contented themselves with firing a few rounds at the more exposed officers who were reconnoitring the ground. Just as the light began to wane, it was seen that the enemy were vacating the main position. At first they came over the hill in driblets, then in considerable numbers. This was the moment for which Major Gore had been waiting. He passed the word for his two squadrons to advance in extended files. The squadron of the 5th Lancers, under Captain M. P. R. Oakes, was on the right, the squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards, under Captain P. H. Darbyshire, on the left. The ground to be crossed was broken and stony, and the left of the line was much impeded by a ravine. As the extended men topped the rise, which had hitherto concealed them, they found themselves athwart of the enemy's line of retreat. About three hundred yards in their direct front was a straggling group of mounted men, moving at a leisurely trot from the field of battle. It furnished the opportunity for which British cavalry had been trained in the past. Major Gore gave the order for which the men had been straining—"Gallop!"—and with levelled lances and bared sabres the two squadrons dashed forward and rode over and through the panic-stricken burghers. As soon as the latter heard

the thud of the galloping horses and the exulting cries of the troopers, they opened out and tried to save themselves by flight. But with so small a start their little ponies were no match for the big-striding Walers, and the cavalry were upon them almost before they realised that they were pursued. Some tried to snap their Mausers from the saddle, some threw themselves on the ground, others knelt down vainly imploring for mercy in the agony of their terror.* For a mile and a half the Dragoons and Lancers over-rode the flying enemy. Then they rallied and galloped back to complete the havoc and to meet such of the fugitives as had escaped the initial burst. In the second gallop but little sabreing or spearing was done, and many prisoners were taken. Then the scattered troopers were again rallied. The men fell in and cheered madly. There was something awful in the dramatic setting of the scene. The wild troopers forming in the thickening darkness, with their reeking weapons bare; the little knot of prisoners, with faces blanched in fear, herded together at the lance point; the dim patches on the veld, which denoted the destruction which had been dealt, and the spasmodic popping of rifles from remote portions of the field as the fighting died out with last light of day, or as the wounded tried to attract attention. It should be said to the credit of the British troopers that, although they had mercilessly carried out the duties attendant upon a cavalry pursuit, yet, once their duty was accomplished, they showed every solicitude for those who had suffered.

* This charge created the greatest terror and resentment among the Boers, who vowed at the time that they would destroy all Lancers they captured. But it must be clearly understood that charging cavalry are fully justified in not giving quarter to individuals (though it was done in a good many cases in this charge at Elandslaagte), unless the whole object of the charge is to be frustrated. Similarly the wounding of men several times over—one young Boer at Elandslaagte received sixteen lance wounds and survived—is a natural and almost inevitable feature of a cavalry charge. The Boers have been the first to introduce into war the theory that every individual has the right to ask quarter for himself at any moment in an action, a theory which our soldiers seem to have almost invariably accepted. Thus Sir G. White, in his despatch on Elandslaagte, notes that in the final stage of the flank attack the Boers remained lying down and firing at our men till they came within twenty yards and then quietly asked quarter, which was invariably granted.

Though drenched to the skin themselves, many parted with their cloaks and blankets to cover the shivering limbs of the wounded, and some even shared their covering with the unwounded prisoners they were guarding. The bearing of the prisoners was the same in every case. They seemed to have been completely cowed and almost stupefied by what they had undergone. The men who a few days previously had entered upon the campaign with light hearts, confident in the conviction that the conduct of war was but a hunting party on an exaggerated scale, were brow-beaten and dumbfoundered by their awful experience at Elandslaagte, and there is not the smallest doubt that if the British had, when hostilities commenced, been able to strike several blows as decisive as that delivered at Elandslaagte, the war would never have assumed its ultimate proportions.

Night on the battlefield.

When the squadrons rallied the greatest uncertainty still existed as to what had taken place in the other parts of the field. Night had fallen with South African rapidity, and with it a miserable drizzle set in. The cavalry and their prisoners cautiously advanced upon Elandslaagte station, hardly sure even whether it was in Boer or British occupation. It proved to be the latter, and the wounded from the infantry encounter were already arriving at the station. Here the prisoners were housed, while the troopers found a more or less cheerful bivouac by building huge fires from coal which was stacked in the station. They also were able to help themselves unstintedly from the supply train which the Boers had captured in the station on October 19, and which had again fallen into the hands of its rightful owners. But all had not fared so well. Certain details of the cavalry had failed to make the rallying point, or had become separated in the darkness. These detached parties spent a miserable night on the veld, but took several prisoners, whom they brought safely into camp in the morning. The infantry, too, were compelled by the fast-falling darkness to bivouac on the position which they had won. They got little rest in the cold and the rain and with the moaning of the wounded round them. It had been impossible to carry more than a part of the wounded down to Elandslaagte station while

daylight lasted, and the sad and gruesome task of searching lasted long into the night. Among those found on the hill was brave old General Kock, mortally wounded through shoulder and groin. As a boy of twelve he had fought the English at Boomplaats, and he was still to live just long enough to listen from his deathbed in Ladysmith to the roar of his own guns shelling the town. His body was sent back to Pretoria to receive the last honour of a public funeral.*

Completeness of the victory.

The victory was complete. The Boers had been driven out of a strong position of their own choosing, and their retreat converted into a demoralised rout. They had left three hundred wounded and whole prisoners in British hands and all the equipment of about 1000 men. Kock's force was completely broken up. The success was due to the bravery of the troops, to the admirable co-operation of the three arms throughout, and not least to the skill with which the infantry attack was developed. In the wide formations he adopted,

* The following description of the battlefield was written by a non-commissioned officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, who volunteered, with other men of his regiment, to aid in the search for the wounded on the battlefield:—

"I'll pass over the struggle over kopje stones to the scene of the battle and the ground over which the infantry had made their attack; the lamps of search parties—Briton and Boer—flickered out in many places, and the calls to attract the attention of the wounded could be heard in every direction. We had a whistle and blew it occasionally, then listened; we were some time before we found anyone, and then near a wire fence we came across a few who had fallen quite close together. All the wounded had been attended to so that we could do no more than give them a drink, and, if possible, cover them over. There were no complaints; one fellow asked me for a cigarette, and an officer of the Manchesters, though shot in the groin and in terrible pain, only said what a grand fight it had been. The wounded seemed to suffer from the cold more than their wounds, and one poor fellow of the Gordons asked me to take the cloak off a dead man, he was so cold. We did all we could—which was, I'm afraid, very little—and made our way back to the bivouac, where a concoction, consisting, as near as I can say, of five parts water, three condensed milk, one of tea, and the other one something strongly suspected of being brandy, was in the course of manufacture. As we came in Captain Reynolds asked me to get him some tea and I managed a mess-tin full of this mixture—I think he liked it. We sat over the fires most of the night, but though our faces were scorched by the fire our backs were cold, and I thought of those on the field."

and in the broad gap of several thousand yards left between the two halves of his attack, Colonel Hamilton showed an insight into the changed conditions of warfare which many other generals were destined still to learn by bitter experience. Considering the character of the position to be taken, the numbers of the attacking force were very small. Nor were the losses, 5 officers and 50 men killed, 30 officers and 175 men wounded, excessive under the circumstances.* The Gordons and Imperial Light Horse suffered most heavily, in part owing to the way in which they got crowded together on the narrowing ridge in the course of the attack instead of spreading down the eastern slope. As at Talana the proportion of officers among the casualties was very high. The Boers undoubtedly made a much better fight of it than at Talana. The guns were bravely served, and the stubbornness of the defence and the boldness of the last counter-attack deserve the highest praise. But they had not yet learnt fully how to make use of their ground, in order to counteract the rain of British shrapnel or check the rush of British infantry. Their casualties, out of a force of about 1000 men actually engaged, were heavy: at least 60 killed,† 120–150

* The following is the list of officers killed and wounded:—Staff: Captain R. G. Brooke; 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment: Captain Lafone, and Lieutenants Gunning, Hayley, and Green, wounded; 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment: Lieut.-Colonel Curran, Captains Melvill, Newbigging, Paton, and Lieutenant Danks, wounded; 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders: Major Denne, Lieutenants Monro, Bradbury and J. G. Murray, killed, Lieut.-Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, Major Wright, Captains Haldane and Buchanan, Lieutenants Meiklejohn, Findlay, Gillat, I. A. Campbell, and Hennessy, wounded; Imperial Light Horse: Colonel Scott-Chisholme, killed, Major Sampson, Captains Orr and Mullins, and Lieutenants Curry, Shore, Barnes, Forbes, Campbell, and Normand, wounded; 21st Field Battery: Captain H. M. Campbell, and Lieutenant Manley, wounded.

† Amongst the Boer dead were found Dr. Coster, ex-State Attorney, one of the few Hollanders whose loss was regretted by the Uitlander community, by whom he had always been liked and esteemed; Count Zeppelin, Landdrost Bodenstein of Krugersdorp, Landdrost Maré of Boksburg, Field-cornet Joubert, and Major Hall of the State Artillery. Lying wounded upon the hillside were, besides Commandant Kock, Field-cornets Pretorius and Pienaar, Colonel Schiel, Captain De Witt Hamer of the Hollander contingent, van Leggelo, Public Prosecutor, and other prominent Hollander and Boer officials.

wounded, and nearly 200 prisoners.* Though forming only a small part of the force the German and Hollander contingents both suffered severely, the latter losing two officers killed and two wounded out of four. Commandant Ben Viljoen, who seems to have made off with his men at an early stage of the fight, was almost the only important Boer who succeeded in escaping.

Oct. 22. Hurried evacuation of Elandslaagte. Anxiety for Ladysmith hampers White's strategy.

While the weary troops threw themselves down to rest on the heights they had won, and while General White was still riding home through the dark, Sir A. Hunter telegraphed out an urgent message that the force was required back in Ladysmith at once. It was only in the course of the day that the ephemeral nature of the success at Talana Hill and the difficulties of General Yule's position at Dundee were realised at headquarters. With that realisation had come the doubt whether, after all, it was any use attempting to re-establish the railway communication with Dundee—the avowed object of General French's expedition in the morning. That being so, there did not seem to be any particular advantage in so large a portion of the Ladysmith force remaining detached sixteen miles away. But the strongest motive for the recall of the troops lay in the apprehension raised by signs of renewed activity on the part of the Free Staters at Bester's, whose numbers, it would seem, were considerably overestimated at the time. By three in the morning the cavalry and guns were already on their way back, and as soon as day dawned the infantry began to be hurried down from their bivouac and into the trains. Whether the fault lay with the alarmist character of the messages from headquarters, or with the officers responsible for carrying out the withdrawal, the withdrawal degenerated into a regular scuttle. Large quantities of captured stores, rifles and ammunition were abandoned, and the two guns, once Dr. Jameson's and now recaptured on Elandslaagte Hill, all but shared the same fate. Even more surprising, fully thirty or forty prisoners were simply left behind to their own devices. There certainly was no force of the enemy in the immediate vicinity of Elandslaagte which warranted the

* Another forty or fifty were taken but slipped away in the night.

feverish haste in which the retirement was carried out, and even if it was advisable to reinforce Ladysmith a small force might well have been left to clear up and to impress the enemy's patrols with the idea that Elandslaagte was still held by our troops. And, menacing as the approach of the Free Staters was, one cannot help feeling that a bolder strategy which would have ventured to neglect that menace and attempted to make some positive use of the signal victory of Elandslaagte would have been attended by far better results. An immediate advance to Glencoe * would have been possible enough, for there were no Boers between it and Elandslaagte, but there was nothing to be gained from such a move comparable to the risk run. But there was yet another course, if Ladysmith had only known or guessed the true state of affairs. The remnants of Kock's force had fled north in utter disorganisation, very few of them stopping to look round before they got to Newcastle. The important pass through the Biggarsberg was left completely open, and a small mounted force could have ridden through unopposed. The blowing up of the bridge over the Ingagane, and the interruption of telegraphic communication with Pretoria, would have created a panic in the Boer Head Laager at Dannhauser, and would probably have resulted in a general falling back of the Boer army. It was a great chance for a cavalry leader like the Confederate general Stuart. But it is doubtful whether at the time the purely isolated character of Kock's advance was understood in Ladysmith, and it would seem rather as if the Staff were under the impression that the whole of Joubert's force was upon them. Though if that was the case it is all the more difficult to understand why no steps were taken to blow up the Sunday's River bridge, not five miles beyond Elandslaagte station. In dwelling on the apparent hesitation and lack of enterprise of Sir G. White's strategy it is necessary to remember how he was hampered by anxiety for the safety of Ladysmith. If the heights round Ladysmith—Pepworth, Bulwana, Cæsar's Camp—had been adequately fortified before the outbreak of war, Sir G. White could have moved about freely and his

* See pp. 199, 210.

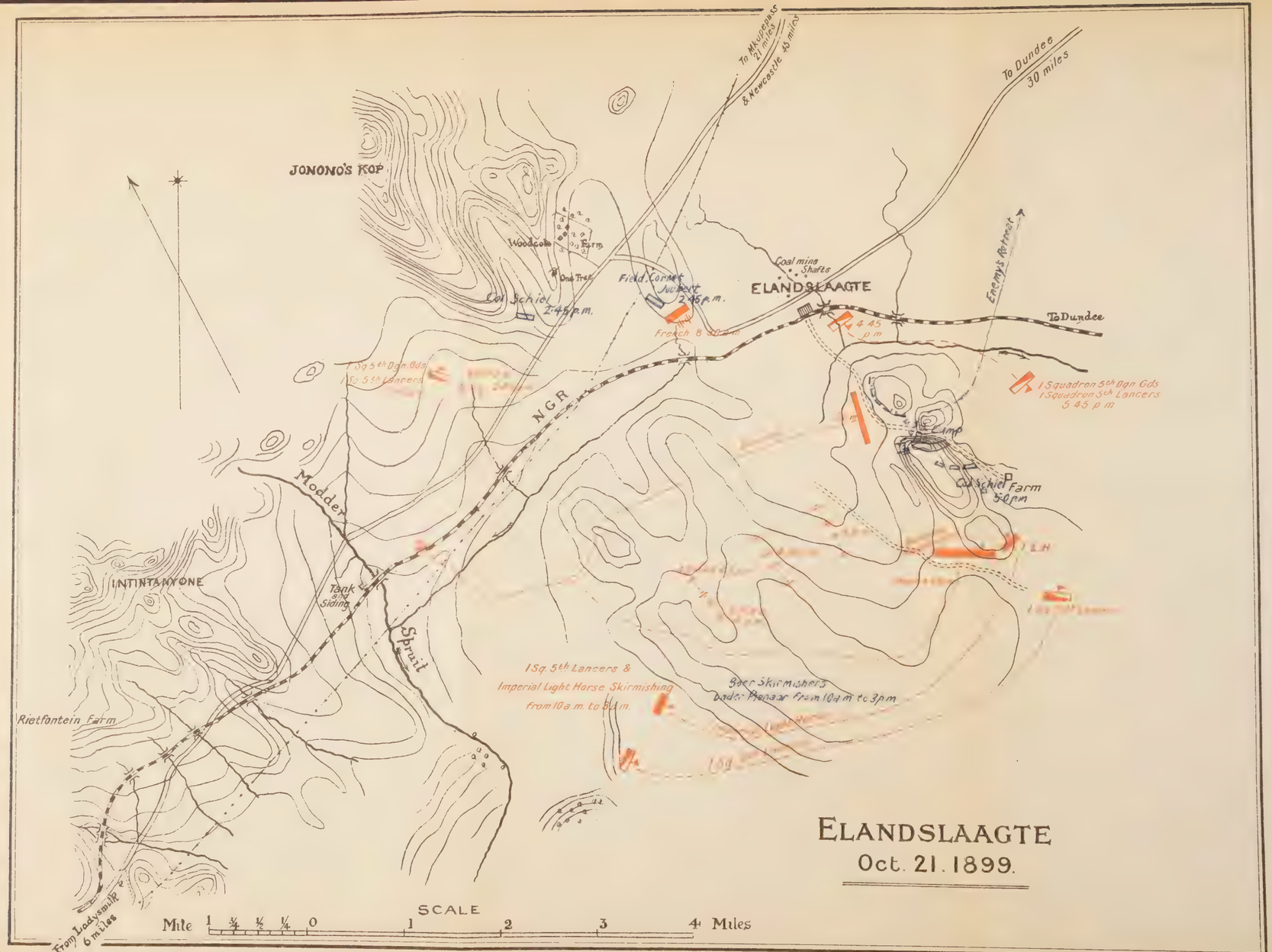
DIRECTIONS

British Infantry

British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry

Boers

Artillery.



ELANDSLAAGTE

Oct. 21. 1899.

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army might have been a real field army instead of being like a dog tied to its kennel by a chain. And even if it was impossible to make up for past neglect in a week, yet if Sir G. White had from the moment of his arrival detached part of his infantry and the town guard to intrench themselves on the heights round the town, he might have been able to effect much more with the rest of his force. However, it is easier, perhaps, to pass criticisms and make suggestions after the event than to realise the difficulties and uncertainties Sir G. White's little force had to face in the first weeks of the war.

Oct. 23. Free Staters occupy Elandslaagte.

The Free Staters during the next few days showed no signs of wishing to attack Ladysmith in force. But a force of some 1000 to 1500 men of the Winburg and Heilbron commandos, under general A. P. Cronje, including among its ranks one Christian de Wet, destined soon to make his mark on the course of the war, moved round the north of Ladysmith, and late in the afternoon on October 23 an advanced patrol under Commandant Nel reoccupied Elandslaagte. They inadvertently fired on a British burial-party on the battlefield, and were struck with amazement at finding the position unoccupied. After the return of the hospital train, these same scouts dislodged the supports of a culvert near Modder Spruit siding. Early in the morning a patrol of the 18th Hussars, thirty strong, under a sergeant-major, had ridden into Ladysmith. They were the advance guard of the column which had been detached to Glencoe by General Yule with the object of cutting off the Elandslaagte fugitives.* They had ridden into the enemy and had been engaged in a desultory manner. Finding themselves cut off from Dundee they had dropped down the Glencoe Pass and wandered into Ladysmith without casualty. The incident is noteworthy as it lends emphasis to the small necessity that existed for the hurried scuttle out of the Elandslaagte position.†

Oct. 21. Yule decides to stay in Dundee, but moves camp.

We must now turn our attention once more to the fortunes of the Dundee column. The crest of Talana had

* It is doubtful, however, if more than a very few, if any, of Kock's force fled towards Glencoe.

† Numbers of civilians had already come down from Dundee on the previous day without having encountered any Boers.

no sooner been cleared than General Yule withdrew his infantry, leaving the Dundee Town Guard in occupation of the heights. As the troops withdrew, the heavy rain, which had been threatening all day, came down in torrents, and night fell on a scene of dreary discomfort and uncertainty. Great difficulty was experienced in the housing of the wounded. The morning after the battle was as wet and cheerless as the evening which had preceded it. In grappling with Lukas Meyer's commando the Dundee column had well-nigh expended itself. As a fighting force it was severely crippled. The casualties of October 20 had left it practically without a directing staff, and the successful assault on Talana had only temporarily brushed aside a small portion of the invading army. From the reports of their intelligence General Yule and his staff were not long in realising that they were still confronted with the main force of the invading army, and that, so far from being free to take the aggressive, they were themselves in a very precarious position. General Yule accordingly telegraphed to Ladysmith that he would require to be reinforced in order to make sure of holding Dundee. By 1.30 Sir G. White's reply came: no troops could be spared without sacrificing Ladysmith and the colony behind; Yule should try to fall back on Ladysmith, and Sir G. White would do what he could to help him when nearer. This was not a direct order to retire, and General Yule was reluctant to abandon his wounded and the large reserve of supplies accumulated at Dundee. But he rightly considered the camp chosen by General Symons within ordinary field artillery range both of Talana and Impati untenable, and proceeded at once to select a new site some distance farther south and on higher ground.

"Long Tom" opens fire from Impati. Camp moved again. Oct. 22. Reconnaissance to Glencoe.

The men had scarcely begun intrenching when the mist which had hung heavily on Impati all the morning cleared away. During the morning the Boers had dragged up on to the western shoulder of Impati a 6-inch Creusot or "Long Tom," which, thanks to British forethought in leaving the bridges untouched, had come down from Laing's Nek by rail. When at 4 P.M. the divided mist declared the British in the plain, the Boer gunners commenced to lay alike upon the old

encampment and upon the men engaged in making the new intrenchments, the latter at a range of 7000 yards. The surprise was hardly less complete than had been the surprise of the first shell from Talana on the morning before. Shell after shell fell amongst the tents and baggage lines. Considering the number and weight of the projectiles the damage was slight, but there were some casualties. Lieutenant W. M. J. Hannah, Leicestershire Regiment, was killed. At the end of an hour the rain and mist stopped the bombardment. The force withdrew under cover and spent a comfortless night in pouring rain. The town was at the same time evacuated by its inhabitants, most of whom took refuge in some farm-houses near the position occupied by the troops; others, less confident in the situation, left by road for the south. At 3 A.M. the troops moved to another site selected for a camp still farther to the south, on a foothill of Mount Indumeni. All ranks anticipated a severe struggle, but hour after hour went by and no enemy appeared. During the morning news arrived of the success at Elandslaagte. Many conflicting reports were in circulation, chief of which was that the main column of the enemy, dispirited by two reverses, was in full retreat upon Newcastle. Acting upon this information, and hoping to intercept some of the fugitives from Elandslaagte, General Yule, at about nine o'clock, marched out with all troops with the idea of occupying Glencoe junction. The enemy were, however, found strongly posted along the ridge from Impati down to the junction. The 69th and 67th batteries came into action against them, and the Hussars had an encounter with a small party, some of their men getting cut off from the rest and eventually making good their way to Ladysmith. Suddenly "Long Tom" opened again upon the force while halted near Glencoe. After a brief cannonade, rain again intervened, and the whole force trudged back through the mire to the position from which they had started in the morning, accompanied by occasional shells.

Oct. 22. Yule decides to evacuate Dundee.

It was then realised by the senior officers that the reports of the demoralisation of the enemy and his retreat of to Newcastle were fables. The force had not had time to recover

from the severe shock of Talana; it was tired and dispirited by useless marching and counter-marching in mud and rain, and by continually shifting camp to avoid the varied intensity of the enemy's shell-fire. It was necessary to come to some decision. General Yule's position was not altogether unlike that in which Sir John Moore found himself at Lugo. He had several alternatives open to him. An attempt to drive Erasmus out of his position on Impati was practically out of the question. It might be possible to delay another day or two expecting the Boers to give some opening for a successful attack. Or, again, he might simply take up a defensive position and hold out till he could be relieved. The general seemed disposed to intrench on Talana, at any rate for the time being, and not retreat till forced to do so. Orders were actually issued for a march to Talana at 9 P.M. But his senior officers succeeded in persuading him to follow the example set by Sir John Moore when he retreated to Corunna. It was determined to leave all standing in the camp, and to slip away by forced marches down the Helpmakaar road.* There can be little doubt that this decision saved the column from disaster and England from the deepest humiliation. It was necessary to abandon the camp, its three months' store of provisions, a considerable quantity of ammunition and the kits of both officers and men. What was felt much more keenly was that the extreme delicacy of the manœuvre necessitated the desertion of the hospital, the dying general, and the wounded. It was impossible even to warn the people of Dundee of the intended evacuation. The smallest intimation in the town would have been conveyed to the enemy's lines in time to have impaired the success of the surprise. Dundee—and Ladysmith too—were teeming with Dutch agents. In fact one of the burghers who captured Colonel Möller's force informed a wounded officer that he had been drinking in the sergeants' mess of one of the British regiments the night before. The Natalians said hard

* Apparently, after coming to this decision, General Yule at first telegraphed to Sir G. White that he intended to fall back on Helpmakaar, but Sir G. White answered ordering him to rejoin the Ladysmith force without delay.

things at the time against General Yule for leaving the Town Guard of Dundee to its fate; but under the circumstances it is difficult to see what other course was open to him.

Oct. 22. The night march out. Beith, Van Tonder's Nek, the Waschbank. Oct. 24.

The retirement commenced at 9.30 P.M. on the night of Sunday, October 22. The orders for the march to Talana still held good and none but the senior officers and Colonel Dartnell, commanding the Natal Police, who was to lead the head of the column on to the Helpmakaar road, had any idea of the real nature of the enterprise. It was very dark, and the stillness of the night was only broken by the rumble and creaking of the transport and artillery, and the murmur of the teams as they strained to pull their burdens through the slough. So quietly was the manœuvre carried out that the townspeople of Dundee slept through it all, and awoke in the morning in the belief, shared by the enemy, that the camp was still occupied. Just outside Dundee a convoy of thirty-three wagons containing the supplies for the march, which Major Wickham had loaded up in the old camp after dark, were skilfully dovetailed into the column. Within two hours the whole column, four miles long, was clear of the town, a piece of admirable management on the part of a short-handed staff. The men were dog-tired when they started, and during the halts, which of necessity were frequent, they threw themselves in the slush and slept until the order to advance or close up was next passed down the line. When day dawned the advance guard had placed ten miles between them and the camp. The force then halted for breakfast. But the danger of pursuit from the enemy in their rear, and the possibility that the passes in front of them might be held, made it necessary to delay as little as possible, and at 10 o'clock the sleeping men were shaken up, and the retreat continued. The column reached Beith, where the road branches to Waschbank, at 2.30 P.M., and bivouacked in the mud until nightfall. The most critical stage of the march was now before it. The next six or eight miles of road led through the steep and narrow defile known as Van Tonder's Nek. In that defile a handful of men could have held up a whole army, and the Boers, if they had become

aware of General Yule's departure early in the morning, had had ample time to send enough men ahead to make a passage impossible. Fortunately the scouts who were sent forward to reconnoitre the pass reported that all was clear. The heights were picketed, and at 11 P.M. the march was resumed. For four weary and anxious hours the tired men dragged themselves down the pass, until the plain at the foot of the Biggarsberg was reached. Once through, officers and men breathed more freely and stepped out, footsore but cheery, over the six miles of plain that separated them from the Waschbank River. The river was crossed in daylight, and the whole column, thoroughly exhausted, threw itself down on the far bank to sleep and get dry in the warm sunshine. It is a safe maxim of South African travel never to halt on the near side of a river, however insignificant. The maxim was once more vindicated, for in the afternoon the river came down in flood, and the outposts on the far side were detained for hours. But the column had now shaken itself clear of the perilous defiles of the Biggarsberg and could congratulate itself on the skill with which it had conducted its escape. The remaining thirty miles of comparatively open country presented no special difficulties, and another day's march would bring it within touch of Ladysmith. Colonel Dartnell, whose local knowledge and cheery confidence had been simply invaluable to General Yule, now left the column and rode into Ladysmith to report its successful arrival at the Waschbank.

Oct. 24. White moves out force to cover Yule's retreat. Shelled by Boers from Tintwa Inyoni.

The Dundee column was, however, not yet clear of all possible molestation. Its further advance westward would bring it into uncomfortable proximity to the Free State commando which had reoccupied Elandslaagte on the preceding day. This rendered it imperative that the troops in Ladysmith should be used to prevent the enemy from attacking the retreating column on its exposed flank. To effect this object Sir G. White moved out on the morning of October 24 with a force comprising an infantry brigade (Gloucesters, Devons, Liverpools, 2nd King's Royal Rifles *) under Colonel Ian Hamilton, the 5th Lancers, 19th

* Just arrived from Maritzburg.

Hussars, Imperial Light Horse and a strong force of Natal Mounted Volunteers under General French, and the 42nd and 53rd Field and No. 10 Mountain Battery, and three days' provisions. His intention was to demonstrate in force against the Free Staters, who were known to be in possession of the Jonono range and of the heights above Rietfontein farm seven or eight miles out of Ladysmith, and thus prevent their coming east of the railway line. The cavalry pushed on ahead, followed at some interval by the main body moving along the Newcastle road in column of route. The cavalry rode nearly as far as Modder Spruit unmolested, but as the head of the main column came opposite the lofty saddle-backed ridge of Tintwa Inyoni (or Intintanyone, the picturesque Zulu name means "the birds fly high") on the left of the road, there was a sudden flash on the northern shoulder of the ridge and a shell pitched with marvellous accuracy into the leading battery (42nd), carrying off Captain Douglas's haversack and killing a horse. Practically at the same moment the flanking patrols of the 5th Lancers were in contact with the enemy's outposts on the low spurs near the road. These outposts the cavalry drove in, and, dismounting, occupied the spurs themselves. The enemy meanwhile made excellent practice with their gun at 4500 yards, but they used black powder and their position stood at once declared. The ridge of Tintwa Inyoni ran roughly parallel to the railway for about a mile. At each end it rose into a hill, the southern peak standing out most prominently. This peak and the northern shoulder of the ridge were perhaps 1000 feet high, but the saddle sank very considerably between them. Behind the saddle was the Boer laager. The Boers occupied the ridge and the heights for several miles on either side of it. Between Tintwa Inyoni and the railway, and likewise parallel to it, was a similar but lower ridge. Between these two ridges lay a plain, perhaps 800 yards in width. The ascent from the railway to this lower ridge was gradual, ending at the summit in a stretch of almost level table-land before dropping rather abruptly to the intervening plain. On to this ridge Sir G. White determined, without more ado, to move forward his infantry and artillery

in order to shell the enemy out of the commanding heights above him. The range from the northern shoulder of Tintwa Inyoni (where the enemy's guns were posted) to the ridge was 1200 to 1500 yards. To the left of the ridge the valley between it and Tintwa Inyoni runs up into a series of nullahs winding round the bases of two smaller kopjes which overshadow Rietfontein, the homestead from which the engagement takes its official name. Both of the British flanks were protected by mounted troops. The Imperial Light Horse, 5th Lancers and 19th Hussars were on the right, while the Natal Carbineers, Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Police and the Natal Mounted Rifles were called back to take up positions on the left.

Oct. 24. Action of Rietfontein or Tintwa Inyoni.

The two field batteries had already been replying to the Boer gun, and now, preceded by No. 10 Mountain Battery, they came into action on the summit of the table-land, and in a few minutes the Boer gun was silenced and removed. The infantry line then deployed along the table-land, the Gloucesters and Liverpools leading, supported by the Devons.* As the infantry slowly advanced, they were received with a long-ranged rifle-fire. They came into action about 8 A.M., and remained under long-ranged fire about four hours until the artillery had practically reduced all opposition from the hill tops. At about 10 A.M. it seemed as if parties of Boers were attempting to turn the British left flank from the lower slopes of Nodashwana, a hill south-west of Tintwa Inyoni. The Natal Mounted Rifles and Border Rifles were protecting this portion of Sir George White's front, and they, directed by Sir A. Hunter, proved equal to the occasion, pushing up the valley from Rietfontein farm, and holding the enemy with dismounted fire from the summit of the two small kopjes which bridged the south end of the valley. An unfortunate incident occurred about 11 A.M. when, owing to some mistake or confusion of orders, the Gloucesters began to advance down the face of the ridge. They at once became the target for a murderous fire and lost heavily. Colonel Wilford and six men were killed, and another forty

* The Rifles were first kept in reserve with the baggage, but four companies were subsequently brought up into the left of the firing line.

wounded, the Maxim detachment which had followed the battalion into the firing-line being almost annihilated. The battalion was unfortunate, for a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse which lay on its right and advanced with it suffered no casualty, though equally exposed to the enemy's fire. At midday Sir George White, having secured heliographic communication with General Yule's column at the Waschbank, considered that he had attained his object, and under cover of the guns the infantry was withdrawn. The enemy in no way molested their retirement, but the cavalry on the right wing, some of whom had pushed on beyond Modder Spruit and carried on a desultory fight with the Boer skirmishing parties, experienced some difficulty in falling back. As long as they held the low kopjes with dismounted rifle-fire they were secure, but as each vantage ground was evacuated, the Boer skirmishers galloped up to it and poured a galling fire into the retiring horsemen.

Result of the Rietfontein action.

As a sensational action the engagement at Rietfontein presents little of interest, though the casualties in the Gloucester Regiment afforded a striking proof of the deadliness of modern rifles at long ranges. The men were simply called upon to carry out the trying task of demonstrating against a position the defenders of which they could not see, and of suffering casualties without the gratifying knowledge that the enemy were losing as heavily as themselves. The total casualties at Rietfontein amounted to 1 officer and 11 men killed; 6 officers and 98 men wounded.* The avowed object of the march was undoubtedly attained. Whether it might have been attained equally well by shelling the hills without bringing the infantry within rifle range, or even by the simple occupation of one or two of the several watching positions available along the Newcastle road, is an open question. Sir G. White certainly believed that he inflicted heavy losses on the Boers, and thus produced a considerable moral effect. But it is doubtful if

* Killed: 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment, Colonel E. P. Wilford; wounded: Lieutenant C. J. Hickie. 42nd Battery R.F.A., wounded: Major A. J. Abdy, Lieutenants A. M. Perreau and G. H. Stobart. 19th Hussars, Lieutenant A. Holford.

these losses much exceeded the Boer official return of 9 killed and 21 wounded. The Boers for their part imagined that they had successfully repelled a British attempt to take their position, and were correspondingly elated. Whether such an attack in force could have been carried out without heavy loss from the ridge below Tintwa Inyoni is an open question. But the Boers had every reason to expect that Sir G. White was endeavouring to oust them from their position. Where they were they not only threatened General Yule's flank, but, what was more important, acted as a screen behind which Joubert's main army could effect its junction with the Free Staters round Ladysmith. The whole strategical scheme on which the occupation of Ladysmith was based demanded that this small body of Free Staters should, even at the risk of heavy losses, be attacked and driven back to the west without delay, so as to allow of free action against Joubert's advancing columns. If Sir G. White considered the force with him insufficient for the task, it might perhaps have been possible to have ordered General Yule to effect a junction with the Ladysmith force somewhere south of Elandslaagte the next day, preparatory to an action on the 26th. However, Sir G. White thought it safest to return to Ladysmith and await General Yule's arrival before taking any further action.

Oct. 24. Yule at Waschbank. Oct. 25. Retreat continued. Experiences of the night march. Oct. 26. Dundee column reaches Ladysmith.

The sound of Sir G. White's guns in action at Rietfontein was clearly heard by the column resting by the Waschbank. General Yule sent out two batteries and most of his mounted troops towards Elandslaagte to see if it were possible to give any assistance. But the detachment returned at 4 P.M. without finding any signs of the enemy, though they were able to heliograph to the Ladysmith column. The danger from pursuit was not now so great, as, indeed, is shown by General Yule's action in detaching so important a part of his force, and the troops rested all that afternoon and evening by the river. But the discomforts of the retreat had in no wise diminished. Rain came down in torrents, making the lowland tracks almost impassable for wheeled traffic. On October 25 the march was resumed at 3 A.M., rearguards being strengthened, as the Basuto scouts reported that Boers

were hovering about. The swollen Sunday's River was successfully crossed by 10 A.M. Shortly after midday the march was resumed and another six miles covered before the column outspanned. It was now within easy reach of Ladysmith, and could hope to march in comfortably the following afternoon. But scarcely had the men thrown themselves down to rest than two squadrons of the 5th Lancers, who formed the advance guard of a supporting column sent out from Ladysmith, rode up. The Lancers were received with loud cheers. But the enthusiasm was damped when it was discovered that they brought the news that Ladysmith considered the situation of the Dundee column very serious, and that it was to continue its march at once. This entailed another effort on the part of the weary troops, and at 6 P.M. they fell in for another night march. The experiences in this, the last of the night marches, were frightful. The column moved at a snail's pace, each man holding on to the file in front of him lest touch should be lost in the inky darkness. The men were sodden to the skin by the streaming torrents of rain, and the track was knee-deep in sticky mud. Wearied, hungry, and miserable beyond endurance, the men fell down asleep in the ranks as they floundered through the mire or stood halted waiting for the baggage to move forward. Oxen and horses fell prostrate in the traces, and, refusing to stand again, were left to die in the track, and completed the disorder of the infantry stumbling over them in the darkness. It sometimes took hours to cover a hundred yards, and the wagon road became an impassable morass. All night through men and animals crawled stolidly and stubbornly through mud and rain. At daybreak the head of the column met the supporting force bivouacked by the Modder Spruit, some seven miles east of Ladysmith. Here a halt was made, while for the next few hours the men staggered in in driblets. Towards midday the force was sufficiently recovered to be able to march into Ladysmith. The men were utterly exhausted by the strain of battle and retreat, caked in mud from head to foot, and dull from the want of sleep. But the battalions shaped as their feet felt the firmer bottom of the Ladysmith roads, and even attempted to sing as they

were met with the acclamations of the garrison. Such was the return of the victors of Dundee. It had been a fine march, a necessary retreat skilfully carried out. General Yule was in such poor health that the conduct of the retreat devolved mainly on Colonel Dartnell, Major Murray, and the other officers of his staff, and on the regimental commanders,* to whom every credit is due for the successful issue of a difficult and dangerous operation. The men bore the hardships of the long marches by day and night, through rain and mud, following upon an exhausting battle and two weary days of moving about in the Dundee valley, with all the imperturbable cheeriness characteristic of the British soldier. But for the last night the column would have arrived a few hours later in as good condition as could be expected of troops who had to cover the not excessive distance of sixty-four miles of muddy roads in four days. But the last thirty-two miles of marching, almost without a rest, culminating in that long night of floundering misery, was a strain which no troops could stand unshaken. The battalions had not time to recover from its ill-effects before their endurance was again put to the test.

Oct. 23. Boers occupy Dundee.

Meanwhile the abandoned town and camp of Dundee had been occupied by the Boers. The heavy and cheerless weather in which the retreat was undertaken, though it impeded the column and reduced men and animals to extreme exhaustion, undoubtedly facilitated its escape. On the morning of October 23 the valley of Dundee was so enveloped in mist that it was not until the column was almost at Beith that the enemy became aware that they had been foiled of their prey. During the morning a few patrols, under Field-Cornet Zeederberg, appeared in the plain near Glencoe Junction and scouted the high ground towards Indumeni, but kept at a respectful distance from the camp, and as hospital orderlies and some of the less severely wounded were moving about, the appearance of occupation

* Colonel F. R. C. Carleton of the Irish Fusiliers, Colonel G. D. Carleton of the Leicesters, Major Bird of the Dublin Fusiliers, Major Campbell of the King's Royal Rifles, Major Knox, 18th Hussars, and Colonel Pickwoad, R.A.

still remained. At 1.30 P.M. the position gun on Impati recommenced to shell the lines of tents. The officer in charge of the abandoned hospital sent one of his staff to inform the Boer leader that he was shelling the hospital. It is not quite clear whether this message gave away the situation before Zeederberg's scouts had actually entered the town. In any case the Boers entered immediately after. They expressed the greatest surprise and chagrin at the escape of the column, but they made no attempt to follow it up. In the afternoon Erasmus's force took regular possession of Dundee. There was no attempt to exercise any control over the burghers, who ran riot in the town and the camp plundering, wrecking, and drinking. Even the hospital failed to escape the zeal of the looters. The orgie went on all night and the next morning; in order to put an end to it Erasmus ordered all spirituous liquors in the town to be destroyed. Gradually some semblance of order was restored, but for many days the wives of the burghers who had flocked into Dundee were busy loading up their wagons with plunder to take back to their farms. Subsequently a magistrate and public prosecutor were installed, and for many weary months the little town was administered as an integral part of the South African Republic. While Erasmus's men occupied Dundee Lukas Meyer set off with a light commando of about 1000 men in pursuit of General Yule's column. But he was in no real hurry to catch up the troops that had handled him so roughly on the 20th, and contented himself by following the British tracks at a leisurely pace.

Oct. 23. Death of General Symons.

General Symons died a few hours after the Boers entered Dundee, and was buried quietly in the little English churchyard. General Joubert, with characteristic courtesy, sent a message of sympathy to the hapless general's widow. It has been necessary in the preceding chapter to criticise General Symons's actions somewhat severely. The unfortunate entanglement of Dundee, which exercised so paralysing an effect on Sir G. White's actions during the first fortnight of the war, was undoubtedly due to his insistence, and the success of Talana should not blind us to the neglect of all precautions which preceded it. And yet those qualities of

self-reliance and unhesitating initiative which characterised him are so essential to a leader, and have shown themselves so rare among our senior officers in this war, that they may perhaps be held to outweigh all his mistakes. The error of judgment as to the fighting capacity of the Boers was very soon cured; the unwillingness to act promptly and face responsibility, due to a faulty system of training, lasted throughout the war. Penn Symons taught the Boers to respect the prowess of British infantry, and the example of his fearless courage and of his gallant end will live long after his mistakes have been forgotten.

Oct. 25–27. The Transvaalers close in on Ladysmith.

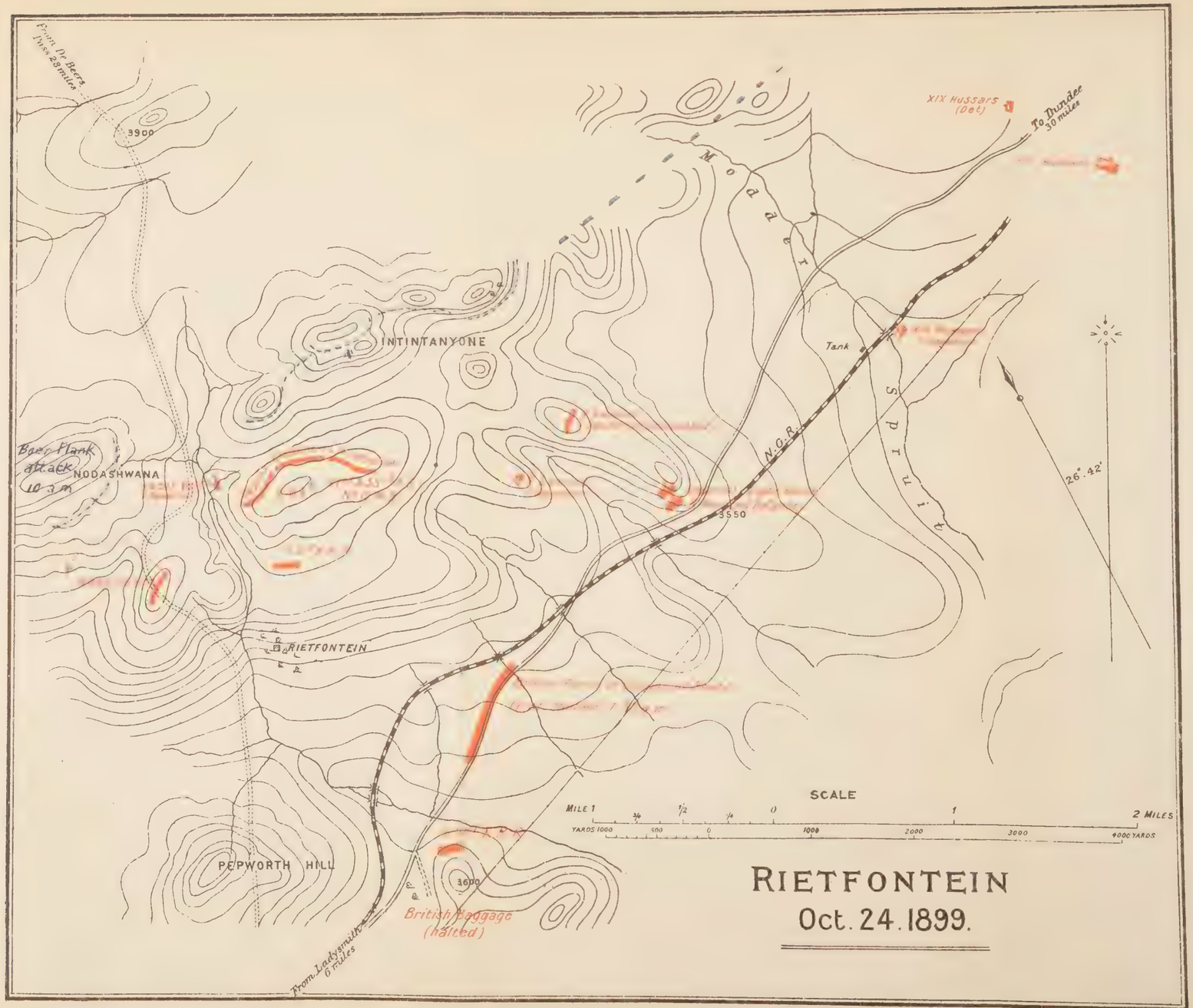
The main body of Joubert's force did not halt long at Dundee. Reinforced by Schalk Burger's commando from the Swazi border, the Boers moved down the Glencoe Pass on October 25. With the railway intact from Glencoe to Modder Spruit, and with the Free Staters in undisturbed possession of the Ladysmith end of the line, the rapid concentration of the whole Boer army on Ladysmith presented neither difficulty nor delay. By October 27 the Transvaal commandos were laagered along the whole eastern and north-eastern front of Ladysmith, from near Farquhar's Farm along the eastern bank of the Modder Spruit up to Pepworth Hill, north of the railway and within five miles of the town. On its southern side alone, from Dewdrop on the west to Bulwana on the east, was Ladysmith still open. The complete envelopment of the British force could only be a matter of a few days, unless Sir G. White proved strong enough to dislodge the Boers by force. The Boers reckoned confidently on their power to frustrate any such attempt. The ease with which 6000 Free Staters had pushed forward on the west and north, defeating (as they believed) Sir G. White's attempts to check them at Bester's or dislodge them at Rietfontein, and the rapidity with which "Long Tom" had driven General Yule out of Dundee, were strong arguments to justify that confidence. Talana and Elandslaagte only impressed the Boer leaders in so far as they suggested the need for caution and exemplified the danger of crowding men and guns together on small positions which could easily be swept by British artillery, and even that impression was lessened

PLAN TO ILLUSTRATE ACTION OF RIETFONTEIN

24TH OCT. 1899

DIRECTIONS

- British Infantry
- British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry
- Boers
- Artillery



RIETFONTEIN
Oct. 24. 1899.

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

by the free exaggeration of the numbers of the British engaged.

Summary of the first fortnight of war in Natal.

Thus ended the first fortnight of the campaign in Natal. On the whole the fortunes of war had been fairly evenly balanced. Sir G. White had gained two minor tactical successes and had managed to extricate himself from the false strategical dispositions with which he had begun the war. But he had failed entirely to carry out his original plan of keeping the Transvaal and Free State forces apart and striking heavily at each of his opponents in turn, and was now face to face with the united forces of the enemy, superior in numbers and mobility, and posted in strong positions so near Ladysmith as to be able to watch almost every movement of his troops. The Boers on their side could claim that they had swept the whole of Natal down to Ladysmith, and that even if they had failed to capture the Dundee column they had taken some 200 prisoners and an enormous supply of stores. Within two days of General Kock's defeat, the Free Staters had occupied the heights on the way to Elandslaagte, from which no serious attempt had been made to expel them, and had ensured the junction of the forces of the two Republics. At Pretoria the highest expectations of success were entertained. For a few hours, indeed, exaggerated reports of Elandslaagte had caused a panic, which it required all President Kruger's imperturbable resolution to stem. But the isolated character of the engagement was soon realised. A strong reinforcement, largely composed of police, was drafted down from Johannesburg, while the broken remnants of Kock's force were left in that town to reorganise themselves. In England the Government and the general public were no less confident that all was going satisfactorily. The dramatic victories of Talana and Elandslaagte obscured the more unsatisfactory features of the situation, which, moreover, were carefully eliminated by the military censorship. There were few who doubted Sir G. White's ability to deliver a crushing blow at the enemy who had in spite of two defeats ventured to come within striking distance of 12,000 British troops.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF LADYSMITH*

Ladysmith: confidence of inhabitants. Activity in camp.

DUSTY little Ladysmith was now the centre of all that the British Empire could do for the immediate defence of Natal. So far this all had not protected Northern Natal from being over-run. But few in England or among British South Africans doubted but that the tide of invasion had already flowed its fullest, and that it was destined before many days were out to be swept back by the force now united in Sir George White's hand. None shared that confidence more completely than the loyal colonists of Natal. If it had not been for the military occupation of Ladysmith camp, and the constant turmoil of arriving "supply," the casual visitor would never have realised that the enemy was actually at the gates. Business proceeded as usual. Ladies gave and attended garden parties. Martial law indeed was in force, and a guard of loyal townsfolk mounted every night, while war rumours formed the chief topic of conversation, but otherwise the ordinary life of the town went on undisturbed. It is a quaint little place, Ladysmith, just a little tin-roofed township nestling in one of the dips of the vast rolling hills; hugging a kopje and a deep-delved stream, and shaded by a few green trees standing out pleasantly amid the bare veld—a town of two parallel streets and a few detached villas, that is all. Yet it was destined to become a township with a history. Three months before the declaration of war it

* The battle has been called by various names: Farquhar's Farm, Lombard's Kop, Modder Spruit, the last, which is the Boer name, being the most appropriate. But none of these names cover the Nicholson's Nek detachment, or indicate the character of the battle as well as the more general title here adopted.

was but a sleepy garrison town, recalling by its name the memory of the fair Spaniard whom gallant young Harry Smith rescued from the sack of Badajoz, and owing whatever local prominence it possessed to the fact that it was the junction of the Transvaal and Orange Free State railway systems. But now it was the living centre of the British armed strength in Natal. Every hour trains rolled in from the south laden with every conceivable assortment of war store. Dutch wagons with spans of sixteen oxen, mule trollies, water-carts and pack trains, thronged the two-mile thoroughfare to the military camp. Every public building had been requisitioned as a store or hospital. From the compounds of churches and schools rose pyramids of beef boxes and flour sacks. The corrugated walls of hired houses were bulging with blanket bales and ordnance stores. Field ambulances and commissariat parks were billeted on every square yard of shaded ground that could be spared. Already three months' stores had arrived. Colonel Ward was straining every nerve to bring yet more food-stuffs into the town to make good the heavy loss due to the abandonment of General Yule's stores at Dundee.

White resolves to strike vigorous blow. He asks for naval guns.

From the very first Sir George White had foreseen that the isolation, possibly even the close investment, of Ladysmith was inevitable, unless he should succeed in checking the Boer advance by a crushing defeat in the field. The hills round Ladysmith were examined, and as early as October 24 the outlines of a scheme of defence were drawn up. At the same time Sir G. White, in view of the fact that the Boers were bringing powerful position guns into the field, telegraphed to Sir R. Harris, the admiral in command at Simon's Town, for some long-range naval guns.* But though con-

* Sir G. White was no doubt aware of the successful experiments which Captain Percy Scott, of H.M.S. *Terrible*, had been carrying out at Simon's Town, in mounting 12-pounders and 4·7-inch naval guns for service on land. Both Captain Scott and Captain Lambton, of H.M.S. *Powerful*, had been very eager to send a number of the guns to the front, besides those sent with the first Naval Brigade to Stormberg, but nothing had been done owing to the objection entertained by the Admiral to denuding still further either his ships or Simon's Town Arsenal (from which the 4·7 guns were drawn). However, on receipt of Sir G.

templating the possibility of investment, Sir G. White determined not to submit to it before attempting some bold stroke to break the circle which was steadily being drawn round Ladysmith. He was now rid of the Dundee entanglement, and, though the Boers were concentrating round Ladysmith in superior numbers, he trusted to their dispersion over more than twenty miles of front to give him an opportunity for delivering a decisive blow on one or more of their main positions. An opportunity for such a stroke was not long in presenting itself.

Oct. 27. Boers camp round Ladysmith. Projected night attack abandoned.

A reconnaissance conducted by General French on October 27 showed that a large commando with artillery was installed two miles east of Farquhar's Farm,* while another was some miles further out near Modder Spruit siding. This was the vanguard of the main Boer army. Desultory skirmishing with the cavalry took place east of Lombard's Kop (about four miles due east of Ladysmith).† Just before dark the laager east of Farquhar's Farm was reinforced by another large commando with guns and wagons coming across from the Newcastle Road, bringing up the total strength to between 4000 and 5000 men, with perhaps ten or eleven guns. Meanwhile Colonel Ian Hamilton, who had come out through Lombard's Nek and bivouacked near De Waal's Farm with an infantry brigade, had asked and received permission to make a night attack upon this laager. A more favourable opportunity for such an attack probably never recurred during the war. The Boers were camped in a straggling laager on both sides of the road on the open plain, unin-

White's telegram, on the afternoon of the 25th, Admiral Harris gave permission to Captain Lambton to mount four naval 12-pounders and two 4·7-inch guns, and take them to Ladysmith with a contingent of about 280 men from the *Powerful*. Within twenty-four hours the guns were mounted under Captain Scott's supervision, and the *Powerful* sailed for Durban on the 26th, arriving on the 29th, and, with admirable promptitude, reaching Ladysmith next day in the middle of the battle.

* Farquhar's Farm is about five miles north-east of Ladysmith.

† A curious incident happened during the afternoon. Several hundred Boer ponies stampeded from the Modder Spruit laager and came down the road almost into the streets of Ladysmith. An attempt to catch them was made by some of the men picketed near the road, but it only succeeded in turning them back, and they were soon safe in laager again.

trenched and quite unconscious of the close proximity of a large British force. There was no long night march to precede the attack, for the Boers were only two miles away. A clearly marked road led from near De Waal's Farm right through their laager, whose position had been accurately sketched and reconnoitred by an adventurous cavalry officer. A small moon would give just enough light for movement but not for firing. The attack was fixed for 1 A.M. A well-defined ridge 800 yards from the laager was to be the starting-point. Here the Royal Irish Fusiliers and Gordon Highlanders, to whom the post of honour had been assigned, were to deploy,* and with fixed bayonets and empty magazines to march directly upon the laager, the other two battalions supporting close behind, while the cavalry and artillery under General French were to stand fast at the bivouac till daylight, in readiness either to complete the enemy's rout or to extricate the infantry if the surprise failed. All ranks lay down excited but confident. At 11 P.M. a despatch rider came from headquarters ordering the force to return to Ladysmith. Apparently Sir G. White, who had been out to Lombard's Nek in the afternoon, at the last moment thought the operation too risky. It was an unfortunate decision. The circumstances were all exceptionally favourable to success, and success would have meant the capture of a good part of the Transvaal artillery and might perhaps have been followed by the panic-stricken flight of the whole Transvaal army. Moreover the Boer camp presented an admirable objective—a thing by no means easy to get with so mobile an enemy, as Sir G. White was soon to find out. The opportunity was not to occur again.

Boer movements. Oct. 28–29.

On Saturday and Sunday the bulk of the troops remained in Ladysmith, only the cavalry being out reconnoitring and skirmishing with small parties of Boers eastwards of Lombard's Nek. The bulk of the Transvaal forces had meanwhile come up and appeared to be threatening a complete envelopment of the town. On Sunday they cut the Ladysmith water supply, and were engaged in building, in full view of the garrison, a gun platform for "Long Tom" on the summit of

* Line of company columns at deploying intervals.

the flat-topped ridge in front of Rietfontein known as Pepworth Hill. Pepworth stands some 300–400 feet above the railway, which passes close under its south-eastern face, and is barely 7500 yards from the centre of Ladysmith. A large laager of the enemy lay in the valley between Pepworth and Tintwa Inyoni. On the same day, as the result of another cavalry reconnaissance, General French reported the Boers to be in force with artillery on Long Hill, a long low ridge north of Farquhar's Farm and south-east of Pepworth, and his report was confirmed by the balloon which was sent up for the first time on that day. The Free Staters were meanwhile reported to have crossed the Ladysmith-Van Reenen Road to the south with their main force, leaving only a small body to the north and north-west of Ladysmith. Upon this information Sir G. White based his plans for a general action for the morning of October 30. An attack upon the Boers on Pepworth for the 29th had been discussed on Saturday but put off, partly from an unwillingness to attack the Boers on a Sunday, a day on which their fanaticism and the memory of Majuba might inspire them with more than usual determination.

White's scheme for a general action for Oct. 30.

The general idea was to take advantage of the pre-occupation of the Free Staters with their advance southwards towards Colenso in order to roll up the whole Transvaal force from its left flank and destroy it by a vigorous pursuit well pressed home. The first objective of the attack was to be Long Hill. After being well "battered" by shrapnel, Long Hill was to be taken in flank and carried—and Talana and Elandslaagte had shown that British infantry were equal to such a task—by an infantry brigade, consisting of the 1st and 2nd Battalions King's Royal Rifles, the Liverpools, and the Leicesters, strengthened by an extra battalion, the Dublin Fusiliers, and supported by Colonel Coxhead's Brigade Division of Field Artillery (21st, 42nd, 53rd Batteries) and the Natal Field Battery. The direction of this important operation was assigned to Colonel Grimwood of the 2nd 60th, the senior regimental officer in the brigade.* Grim-

* Brigadier-General Francis Howard, who was appointed to the command of the 7th Infantry Brigade, and would, therefore, naturally have

wood's right flank was to be covered by General French with the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, and the whole of the Natal Mounted Volunteers, who were to cross Lombard's Nek (which was to be secured by detachments of Natal Volunteers sent out beforehand) and the Modder Spruit and then wheel northwards on the flank of the attack. Colonel Ian Hamilton meanwhile was to take up a position under cover of Limit Hill, about half-way between Ladysmith and Pepworth, with his brigade, consisting of the Devons, Manchesters, and Gordons,* together with the divisional troops, viz., Colonel Pickwoad's Brigade Division of Artillery (13th, 67th, and 69th Batteries), the Imperial Light Horse, the 5th Dragoon Guards, and 18th Hussars. From there Pickwoad's artillery was first of all to co-operate in shelling Long Hill. When Long Hill was carried, Hamilton's and Grimwood's infantry together were to storm the Boer main position on Pepworth and capture the guns. As soon as the Boers were in full flight along the road leading across the hills to the north of Pepworth, the cavalry† were to gallop round by the road

commanded one of the brigades improvised after the return of General Yule (whose health had given way), arrived on Monday morning by train from the south. Finding that his brigade was already in action, in a country which was new to him, he wisely preferred not to take over the command.

* In the morning this column was reinforced by the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade under Lieutenant-Colonel Metcalfe, which arrived by train from the south and was at once sent out into the fighting line.

† *i.e.*, presumably the cavalry with Hamilton. Sir G. White's despatch simply says the cavalry, but it is hardly credible that he intended French's cavalry, which, after the capture of Long Hill, would probably be far out on the right flank towards Rietfontein, to double back and make a round of fifteen or twenty miles in order to catch an enemy already straight in front of them. Presumably, too, it would be the presence of the cavalry on the right wing which was supposed to prevent the Boers from taking their natural line of retreat along the Newcastle Road, and would drive them northwards to meet the other cavalry. It is possible, also, that at the time Sir G. White believed that part at least of the Boer force at Pepworth was composed of Free Staters, who would naturally work westwards after getting north of Tintwa Inyoni and then run across the front of the pursuing cavalry. As a matter of fact, however, the small Free State force under A. P. Cronje only stayed out at Rietfontein long enough to cover the advance of the Transvaal forces, and was now withdrawn west of the road from Ladysmith to Nicholson's Nek. Nor is it altogether easy to understand how Sir G. White thought that a force riding through

that goes up the valley of the Bell Spruit and catch them on the open ground north of Tintwa Inyoni. Seven miles out of Ladysmith this latter road passes through a defile known as Nicholson's Nek. Here the pursuit might easily be checked by the small body of the Free Staters known to be still in this direction. To prevent this and keep the pass open, and, at the same time, in order to occupy as many of the enemy as possible and so cover Hamilton's left flank, Sir G. White decided to send a small column right through the Boer lines to occupy the Nek or some point conveniently near it. This column was to consist of the Gloucestershire Regiment, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and No. 10 Mountain Battery, the whole under the command of Colonel Carleton of the Irish Fusiliers, with Major W. Adye, D.A.A.G. for Intelligence, attached as staff officer and guide. Major Adye, who had been some months at Ladysmith and had, during the last few days, made several bold reconnaissances of the Boer positions, is generally credited with having first suggested to Sir G. White this adventurous scheme, which was by no means to the liking of other members of the General's staff.

Criticism of White's scheme. Its gambling character.

The whole scheme for the day's operations was extraordinarily bold and comprehensive, and to attempt to carry it out against an enemy at least equal in numbers and vastly superior in mobility, and over so wide a front, argues a self-confident optimism in Sir G. White that contrasts curiously with the hesitations of the preceding fortnight and the caution of the months to follow. It was a difficult scheme, too; the extreme distances to be covered by the infantry under the burning Natal sun, the double attack, the intricate device for the cavalry pursuit, would all tax the endurance of the troops and the skill of the staff to the utmost. There was no

Nicholson's Nek could help in capturing the Boer laagers (see despatch of December 2, 1899) which were known to be behind Pepworth and east of Long Hill. In the present chapter the attempt has been made to give as coherent and intelligible a scheme of Sir G. White's intentions as can be gathered from his despatches and subsequent speeches. But the actual orders issued before the battle were of the vaguest and most inadequate character, and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Sir G. White's own ideas of what he intended to do were somewhat lacking in definiteness.

provision in it for failure or miscalculation. Everything hung on the assumption that Long Hill was, by night and day, the actual left flank of the Boer position.* If the Boers happened not to be on Long Hill or refused to defend it, and drew off eastwards, or if they attacked Grimwood on the undulating ground to the south of it, a further advance on Pepworth became almost impossible on that side; while unless the Pepworth position was taken the column at Nicholson's Nek ran the most serious risk of capture. The detachment to Nicholson's Nek was, in fact, a most remarkable conception, alike for its curious ingenuity and for its rashness. Only the utmost care to neglect no precaution that could insure victory in the main action and the most desperate efforts to secure that victory at any cost of life could have justified it. But the secret orders issued on Sunday night were vague and sketchy to a degree that was responsible for much of the subsequent confusion, and the spirit of desperate resolution in which the enterprise was conceived seems to have passed away amid the cares and responsibilities of the morning's battle. It cannot be said that there was any urgent necessity for so hazardous an enterprise. There were good reasons for deferring it till Sir R. Buller, who was expected almost hourly, could be consulted. And, in any case, a policy of actively worrying the Boers day by day, threatening their laagers and communications, striking hard wherever possible, and generally keeping them at arm's length, offered a safer prospect of success. But, till French round Colesberg and Lord Roberts in his great marches gave a truer example of strategy, the idea of the one day's battle deciding everything seems to have dominated the minds of British generals.

Boer dispositions drawn up to invite attack. They upset White's plans by withdrawing from Long Hill.

The Boer forces north of Ladysmith, some 12,000 in all, were camped along an irregular crescent extending from the Harrismith railway on the north-west to the laager near Farquhar's Farm on the east. The central section from Bell Spruit eastwards, over Pepworth Hill and as far as the north

* This assumption, based apparently on General French's report, is not easy to reconcile with the fact that the laager which Hamilton had wished to attack on the 27th was known to be well to the south-east of the hill.

end of Long Hill, was assigned to Erasmus's division, whose artillery (four Creusot field-guns, two "pom-poms" and "Long Tom," under Trichardt and Wolmarans) was now dragged up on to the summit of Pepworth. The left wing was held by Lukas Meyer's division, some 4000 strong, with its artillery (three or four guns and two "pom-poms" under Pretorius), and between him and Erasmus were posted the Heidelberg commando under Commandant Weilbach, and the newly arrived Lydenburg and Swaziland commandos, under General Schalk Burger, with two Krupp Howitzers and a "pom-pom" under Major Erasmus. The right wing was formed by the small Free State force under A. P. Cronje, and was camped among the hills round the upper Klip River. Between the right and the centre there was a broad gap formed by the valley of the Bell Spruit, and a hogsback ridge known as Tchrengula (Caimguba) to the west of it, only covered by a few patrols—the gap on which Sir G. White's plan for Nicholson's Nek depended. General Joubert's dispositions were drawn up with the deliberate intention of inviting a general attack. He had little doubt, from his experience of British methods, but that the attack would be delivered directly on Pepworth Hill, on which he was now so ostentatiously posting his position artillery. Pepworth accordingly was the one point he decided to hold, leaving the rest of his line completely mobile, ready either to play with the British, and prevent any attempt at outflanking, or to deliver a powerful flank attack. The former part would most probably fall to his weak right wing, conveniently posted on hilly ground, the latter he intended to carry out with his left, on which he massed all men and guns that could be spared from the defence of Pepworth. It was perhaps in pursuance of this general idea, rather than from any accurate insight into Sir G. White's intentions, that he withdrew his burghers on Sunday evening from Long Hill to behind the Modder Spruit. It is even more probable that the withdrawal was not due to any definite order at all, but simply to the fact that the Boers left the hill at night in order to sleep in their laager, a contingency which was apparently not foreseen by Sir G. White when he framed his plan, or discovered subse-

quently by sending men to crawl over the position after dark. Whatever the reason, the most consummate strategy could not have achieved better results for the Boers. The occupation and subsequent evacuation of Long Hill had all the effect of a skilfully designed feint. It left Sir G. White's blow to spend itself on empty air, and made him execute an elaborate turning movement inside of, instead of round the flank of the Boer position. The only chance, such as it was, of still carrying out Sir G. White's plan of rolling up the Boer left now lay in a bold, sweeping movement by the cavalry on the right wing, which might frighten the Boers into falling back northwards, or might hold them in position for an energetic infantry attack. All depended on the promptitude with which the commanders on the spot discovered the changed situation and altered their dispositions to suit.

The night march. Mishap to Carleton's column. Half Grimwood's brigade goes astray.

At 10.30 P.M., or soon after, the British infantry columns moved out. The unhappy fate of the Nicholson's Nek column forms a story of its own. For the present purpose it is sufficient to say that the column started late, and that about two miles before reaching Nicholson's Nek, Colonel Carleton thought it wiser not to proceed any further, but to take up a waiting position on Tchrengula. During the ascent of the hill the mules of the column stampeded, causing the loss of the mountain guns, and most of the spare ammunition. The noise of the stampede alarmed the Boers, who at first believed they were being attacked in force on that side, and heavily reinforced the edge of the plateau east of Bell Spruit. Even after the real direction of the British attack became apparent, a considerable portion of the Boer centre, and nearly all the Boer right, remained occupied with Carleton's column, and took no part in the main action. Sir G. White was informed before 3 A.M. that things had gone wrong by the arrival at headquarters of one of the bombardiers of the Mountain Battery, but it was not till six or seven that he learned the details as to the stampede and the loss of the battery. Grimwood's brigade marched out by the Helpmakaar Road, branching off to the left some two or three miles out, and striking across for the south end of Long Hill. Owing to the

vagueness of the orders issued, or to some confusion in the staff instructions supplementing them, Colonel Coxhead's brigade division of artillery, which was in the middle of Grimwood's column, and which Grimwood understood was to accompany him to some position south of Long Hill, turned aside during the march in order to take up the position behind the kopje known afterwards as Flag Hill, east of Limit Hill, assigned to both brigade divisions by Colonel Downing, the officer commanding the whole artillery. Not only did the artillery leave the column in the darkness without Grimwood's knowledge, but it carried away with it the Liverpools, Dublin Fusiliers, and the mounted infantry companies of the 60th and Leicesters. The whole incident was a very bad piece of staff work on somebody's part, and gravely prejudiced the chances of the day. The three leading battalions marched on in blissful ignorance and, shortly before daybreak, formed up behind a couple of low lying rocky kopjes 1800 yards south of Long Hill. Their officers extended them in preparatory formation for attack, and anxiously waited for the dawn to show them if they had correctly chosen their position. Hamilton's brigade had meanwhile marched forward shortly before daybreak to take up its position behind Limit Hill. Here it remained perfectly concealed, and though within easy gun-range of both Pepworth and Long Hill, was completely unmolested during the action.

Grimwood finds himself "in the air." Gradually swings round to face east. 5 A.M.–8 A.M.

Day broke crisp and clear, and the whole position lay baldly declared. Grimwood's brigade was drawn up exactly as had been intended. But where was the artillery? Where were its own rear battalions? Where, above all, were the promised cavalry? Without cavalry the right flank and rear of the infantry line was completely in the air. Anxiously Grimwood and his staff swept the southern and eastern skyline for signs of mounted men. They had not long to wait. Before many minutes had passed, single horsemen appeared and disappeared here and there. These were followed by scattered parties, seen for a moment, as they cantered from the shelter of one little kopje to another, mostly sidling along from east to south, and all the time edging up closer to Grimwood's flank. But there could be no mistaking these for

British troops, even if the Mauser bullets beginning to sing overhead had not sufficiently proclaimed their intentions. Gradually the fire became hotter, and presently the Boers brought two field-guns into action against the kopjes where the Rifles were drawn up. Two companies of Leicesters with a Maxim were sent to occupy a ridge about 350 yards away, running down towards the Modder Spruit, in order to cover the right rear of the brigade. A battery of artillery was sent for, and the 21st and 53rd coming up, temporarily silenced the Boer guns. This was about 7 A.M. From Grimwood's position it had been evident for some time that Long Hill was unoccupied. But with the right flank already heavily attacked, there was little to be gained by a move northwards, which would only have allowed the enemy to work still further round the rear of the brigade. Colonel Grimwood decided to remain where he was and sent back a staff officer to apprise Sir G. White of the situation. The brigade was gradually swung round, so as to face east instead of north, and was eventually extended in a long irregular line from within rifle range of Farquhar's Farm to some distance along the low ridges which stretch down northwards from Lombard's Kop.

Artillery come into action 6 A.M.–8 A.M.

Meanwhile the artillery on both sides had been actively engaged. Day had scarcely begun when a pillar of white smoke above Pepworth, followed by an explosion in Ladysmith, proclaimed to the startled citizens the presence of "Long Tom," the conqueror of Dundee. Colonel Downing at first attempted to concentrate his fire on Long Hill from under the cover of Flag Hill and the broken ground between it and Limit Hill, firing over the rise by the help of aiming posts. But the slope was too rocky to permit the accurate laying required for this work. It was also beginning to be realised that Pepworth and not Long Hill was the main position of the Boer artillery. So about six o'clock the whole of the batteries (excepting the 69th, subsequently sent round to Lombard's Nek) left their cover behind Flag Hill and extended in a fan-shaped line in front of the centre of the British position. The Boer gunners were not long in discovering them, and opened from Pepworth and

from somewhere behind the north end of Long Hill. Their practice was excellent, but the fuzing of the shells indifferent, and most of the shrapnel burst in the ground. The British batteries unlimbered, the left hand batteries replying vigorously to the Boer guns, while those on the right for some time continued to pour their shrapnel over the empty emplacements on Long Hill, the 21st and 53rd being soon after sent on to silence the Boer guns which were playing on Grimwood. It was difficult at first to locate the Boer guns with any precision. But invisible as was the actual discharge of the smokeless powder it was not long before the concussion and recoil of the guns on the hot, dry ground raised a dust which gave the British gunners the target they desired. The Boer guns on the right were for the time being quickly silenced. But the battery on Pepworth at 4500 yards range was too far off to get the full effect of the shrapnel fire. The 42nd and 67th batteries (Goulburn and Manifold) were pushed forward into the open 1500 yards nearer to the position. This movement at once attracted a concentrated and accurate shrapnel fire from the gunners on Pepworth, and men and horses began to fall. As the first shell fell among the guns the Boers on the hill, as at Talana, leapt up waving their hats and cheering loudly. But the British plied their guns with such good effect that, in spite of scathing shrapnel, in another twenty minutes they were only answered by desultory shots. Trichardt's gunners stood up manfully to the superior weight of fire directed upon them, but it was too much for them, and they now took shelter behind the rocks waiting till the fire should slacken or the batteries turn their attention elsewhere. At the same time most of the Boer riflemen who had been cheering so enthusiastically made off down the reverse of the hill, while some of the bolder among them moved down the western slope and worked forward into the broken ground south-west of Pepworth, where they could hope to check an attack upon the hill without exposing themselves to concentrated artillery fire. But for the rest of the morning the actual summit of Pepworth was unoccupied save for the men of the "Staats Artillerie" and for a handful of burghers and

of Blake's Irish Brigade, who remained and indefatigably helped in dragging up ammunition under the hail of British shrapnel.

Failure of cavalry on the right. French takes up defensive position.

We must now turn to the British cavalry who were to have covered the right flank of the infantry attack. In accordance with Sir G. White's orders the cavalry moved out at about 3 A.M., part going off towards Limit Hill, while the main body under General French rode out by the Helpmakaar road. But instead of riding on through Lombard's Nek and getting well out to the right of Grimwood before daybreak, French only went as far as the western foothills of Lombard's Kop, some two miles to Grimwood's left rear, and there halted his men pending the development of the engagement. Apparently French, assuming that Long Hill marked the extreme left of the Boer position, thought that there was ample room north of Lombard's Kop for his force to get out when required, and preferred to keep the main body of his cavalry together ready to take up the pursuit rather than to use them up as a widely thrown-out containing-line. Given the cavalry tactics of 1899 this decision was in itself not unnatural. But nothing can illustrate more clearly the lack of precision in the orders issued than the fact that it was possible for General French to take up this position when Colonel Grimwood was led to expect his presence at daybreak on his right flank. About 6.30 A.M., as soon as it seemed that the Boer artillery had been silenced, General French, apparently still unaware of the real disposition of the Boers, considered that the right moment for advance had come, and the 5th Lancers and 19th Hussars mounted and rode forward. Two squadrons of the Lancers rode up to a small kopje forming part of Grimwood's position, the Hussars going further to the right to what was then Grimwood's right rear. The Lancers, who expected to be fired at, if at all, from their left, received a heavy fire in front and on their right flank as well. The 19th Hussars met with an even warmer welcome, coming under fire first from the Boer guns and then from the Boer riflemen, who lay low till the Hussars' ground scouts were almost among them and then poured a heavy short-ranged fire into the

leading troop. The men were dismounted behind the nearest ridge by General French and proceeded to line the crest. But French soon saw that there was nothing to be done on this side which could not be done by Grimwood's infantry, and the cavalry mounted and rode back under a heavy "pom-pom" fire to the nek north of Lombard's Kop. By now the Boer skirmishers had extended their line as far south as the Helpmakaar road. Whether a bold advance with dismounted troopers might still have succeeded in pushing back the Boers sufficiently to enable the cavalry to get out on to their flank is doubtful. The ground east of the Modder Spruit, a mass of low kopjes running like waves into one another and strewn with rocks and bushes, was well suited to Boer tactics, and British cavalry had not yet learnt to adapt themselves successfully to the part of mounted riflemen. A possible alternative, though perhaps a risky one, might have been to send part of the cavalry right round to the south of Mount Bulwana, a detour of nine or ten miles. But the French of Mournful Monday was not yet the daring cavalry leader whose wide sweeping movements, a few months later, paralysed the Boer resistance. What he actually did was to take up a line in front of Lombard's Kop and on the subsidiary kopjes north-east of it, thus prolonging Grimwood's right. But so far from being able to advance, the dismounted cavalry found it as much as they could do to hold back the Boers, now increasing in numbers and pushing up closer, and towards 8 A.M. General French reported to Sir G. White that he could only hold on to his position with difficulty.

8 A.M. Situation now fully developed. Alternative decisions open to White.

The situation that now plainly confronted Sir G. White was far from pleasant or easy to deal with. On the right the intended movement upon the Boer left flank had from a variety of causes completely failed. Instead of sweeping the Boers northwards Grimwood's and French's troops were drawn up facing eastwards on a front nearly four miles long. Along the whole of this front they were being hotly pressed by the Boers, who at the same time seemed to have enough men available to threaten an envelopment of both flanks of the British line, long though it was. On the left flank the

Nicholson's Nek scheme had fallen through and Colonel Carleton's column, without its guns and presumably not unshaken by the stampeding of its mules, was defending itself on an isolated ridge in the middle of the Boer position, whence the faint sound of distant fusillades could occasionally be distinguished during the lulls in the main battle. It was necessary to come to some definite decision, to form some new plan to supersede the original one which had fallen through. There were several courses open to Sir G. White. One, the most obvious perhaps, was to abandon the projected attack on Pepworth, throw Hamilton's brigade into Grimwood's, send all the cavalry across to French, and try to break the Boer left by sheer weight. If the Boers were really broken and lost heavily in casualties, it was possible that they might disperse altogether on the east of Ladysmith. Their southern laager would then fall into Sir G. White's hands, and the Pepworth position, if not at once abandoned by the enemy, could be attacked that afternoon or the next day. But the prospect of such a definitive result was not very hopeful. The scattered skirmishing-line of the enemy offered no tangible objective, and it was doubtful if the whole British force could do more than just push the Boers back a mile or two among the rough kopjes east of Modder Spruit. Meanwhile Colonel Carleton would have to be left to take his chance. An alternative, though one that is never very easy for a general to take, was to give up the idea of a general engagement, treat the morning's operations as a reconnaissance in force, and fall back on Ladysmith, subsequently sending out a column to help in Colonel Carleton. A more enterprising but hazardous course would have been to have left Grimwood and French on the defensive and to have attempted to carry Pepworth with Hamilton's brigade. That the actual crest of Pepworth was almost unoccupied was probably not known to White, but it was evident that the main force of the Boers was engaged elsewhere, and the fact that Long Hill was empty and that the Boer right was engaged with Carleton, left free both flanks of the attack. The capture of Pepworth and its guns would have been a crushing blow to the Boers, and from there it would have been an easy matter to join hands with Carleton.

White lets action continue *in statu quo*. Orders Carleton to retire.

Sir G. White did not definitely decide on any of these courses. His eventual action was a compromise between the first two, but for the time being he temporised, perhaps in the hope that the check on the right was only momentary. General French seemed to be in the greatest difficulty, so Sir G. White detached, first the 5th Dragoon Guards, and, later, the 18th Hussars, under General Brocklehurst,* and the 21st and 69th Batteries to his support, Blewitt pushing down the nek immediately north of Lombard's Kop, from where he checked the Boer attempts to outflank Grimwood and the left of the cavalry position, while Wing engaged a "pom-pom" which was harassing the Natal Volunteers at Lombard's Nek. With this reinforcement the cavalry "held their own" for the rest of the morning—an ineffective part for cavalry to play. Grimwood's brigade, supported by the 13th and 53rd Batteries, seemed to be holding its own already. Sir G. White was apparently satisfied with this state of affairs, and Hamilton's brigade remained in waiting, while the 42nd and 67th Batteries replied to the Boer guns on Pepworth and north of Long Hill, which had reopened fire with some vigour. But he could not be otherwise than anxious about the safety of the Nicholson's Nek force. It was impossible for mounted messengers to ride up the valley of the Bell Spruit, now completely commanded by the Boers. An officer's patrol of the 5th Dragoon Guards had made an attempt earlier in the morning to get through to Carleton, but in spite of the gallantry of Lieutenant Norwood and Private Sibthorpe (for which they received the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Conduct Medal respectively), had been compelled to return. An attempt to send through Kaffir runners proved equally unsuccessful. A heliographic message, ordering Carleton to "retire as opportunity offered," was not sent for some time, as the heliograph at Bell's Farm failed to elicit any answer to its call from the heliographs that Carleton was supposed to have with him.

The British right, 8–11 A.M. Grimwood's incompetence.

The whole of the interest now centred on the British

* Major-General Brocklehurst arrived that morning by train to command the cavalry brigade in Natal. Unlike Brigadier-General Howard, he joined his command in the field.

right. The Boers, whose numbers were steadily increasing by reinforcements streaming down from behind Pepworth and Long Hill, and by contingents still coming up from Dundee, were pushing their attack in earnest, and were making a bold bid to turn the left of Grimwood's position. About 8.30 their gunners, who kept moving their guns from place to place as the British gunners found them out, located the spot where the Rifles' ammunition mules were massed under cover, and pouring in a heavy shrapnel and "pom-pom" fire, successfully stampeded them. About 9 o'clock the reserves of the Leicesters and 2nd 60th were moved up to the assistance of the 1st 60th, who were being hard pressed at a range of about 800 yards, and before long the whole of Grimwood's brigade was in the firing-line—excepting, indeed, the two strayed battalions, whose existence seems to have been completely forgotten by everybody, as they lay lost in the middle of the battlefield, the Liverpools near the first position of the guns, and the Dublin Fusiliers by the Helpmakaar road. Under an intensely hot fire the brigade lay scattered along the ridges fronting the Modder Spruit. There the men lay for hours with the glowing sun beating down on them, and the quivering heat rising round them from the baking rocks. Sometimes they would gain a little ground by short rushes, sometimes fall back a little at some point where the Boers concentrated too heavy a fire. The men fought well, but their efforts were directed to no definite end. Colonel Grimwood, to whom the fetish of seniority had assigned so all-important a command, proved quite unfit to grapple with the extremely difficult situation in which, largely by the mistakes of others, he was placed; completely unnerved, incapable of issuing orders, too confused to remember the position of his men or to try and recover his missing battalions, he simply left his brigade to itself. With such a commander, what little chance remained of retrieving the situation on the right was thrown away.

Botha takes over the lead of Boer left owing to collapse of Lukas Meyer.

The Boers on their side, too, had at first suffered from want of direction, though, in a force where every man was his own general, that mattered less. Lukas Meyer, who had already shown incompetence and lack of nerve at Talana,

and whose health had been indifferent ever since, collapsed entirely at an early stage of the fight. He had to be helped off his horse, and left the field, returning soon after to Pretoria, where he remained some months, suffering from his nerves and general weakness. His colleague for Vryheid in the First Volksraad, Louis Botha, informally took over the command of Meyer's division. A new spirit and purpose were at once infused into the Boers. It was on this morning that Louis Botha first won the admiration and confidence of his countrymen, and began that military career in which he was soon to gain such distinction. Of striking appearance, attractive, cultivated, a born leader of men, Louis Botha from this day forward became the idol of the younger burghers, though it was not before another series of coincidences enabled him at Colenso and Spion Kop to show his capacity for generalship on a large scale that the elder Boers, whose superstitious reverence for age almost equalled that of the British, forgave him the crime of being but thirty-five years old.

Artillery contest, 8–11 A.M. Success of Boer artillery.

All six British batteries were now incessantly employed in endeavouring to keep the Boer rifle and gun-fire under. Their formation was peculiar, extending over a complete semi-circle—from the 42nd and 67th, firing north-west at Pepworth from the position they had occupied nearly all the morning, to the 21st and 69th facing south-east from in front of Lombard's Kop and Lombard's Nek. But against the scattered line of riflemen shrapnel could do but little, while the Boer guns on the east, several of which considerably outranged the British, were no sooner silenced than they reopened fire from some new quarter. Both on Pepworth and along the Modder Spruit, the Transvaal artillery fully justified the expectations the Boers had formed of it, and reversed the contemptuous estimate in which the British authorities had hitherto held it. The 37-mm. Maxim-Vickers automatic guns or "pom-poms" proved especially disconcerting, and with the "Long Tom" on Pepworth and the intensity and omnipresence of the Boer rifle-fire combined to create the confused surprise with which the British began to realise that the Boers were a far more formidable adversary than they had expected.

DIRECTIONS
British Infantry
British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry
Boers
Artillery
Battle of
TALANA HILL
OCT. 20. 1899
Scale of Miles.
TALANA HILL
SMITH'S NEK
LENNOX HILL
DUNDEE
GLENCOE JUNCTION
Coalfields
Church
Station
Sandspruit
Indumeni Spruit
Sand River
Dr Schultz's Farm
Maritz or Adelaide Farm
Coal Shaft
GREGORY
Landman's Drift & Pont
MALUNGENI
Fort Pine
Hudderfield Fm
Cinderford Fm
Sheepridge Fm
INDUMENI
Boer Advance Oct 19 20
Boer Retreat Oct 20 3 pm
To Coalfields
To Vant's Drift
To De Jagers Drift
Smith's Farm
Donga
Old stone laager
From Ladysmith 40 miles
To Helpmaar 21 Miles from Dundee
SPOTTISWOODE & Co Ltd LITH. LONDON.

Situation in Ladysmith. Colonel Knox's anxiety about the town.

While the engagement was taking place outside the town the situation in Ladysmith was not a happy one. Ever since daybreak "Long Tom" had been intermittently bombarding the northern end of the town. The terrifying explosion of its 94-pounder projectiles as they fell near the railway station thoroughly unnerved the inhabitants. At an early hour loose mules and draggled gunners had found their way into the town and reported that disaster had befallen Colonel Carleton's column during the night. As the day wore on stragglers from the battlefield, by the garbled accounts which they gave, added to the disquietude. By ten o'clock Ladysmith, so confident and careless a few hours before, was in a state little short of panic. Colonel W. G. Knox, R.H.A., who was in command of the few details which remained to garrison the town, anticipating an attack from the north, had armed every available man, and occupied King's Post, a hill outside the town where some rudimentary defences existed. So few men were available that it was necessary to impress the drivers of the engineer park and ammunition columns, as well as every detail in the camps. The two field-pieces captured from the Boers at Elandslaagte were dragged into position, and every effort made to place the northern perimeter in a state of defence. Boers in some strength were visible on Surprise Hill and up the valley of the Bell Spruit. Later on the Boers also showed themselves by the Harrismith railway, and Colonel Knox, towards 11 A.M., considered the situation sufficiently alarming to send a message to Sir G. White, expressing a fear that the town was about to be attacked.

11.30 A.M. White decides to withdraw into Ladysmith.

This message would seem to have confirmed a decision to which Sir G. White had for some time been reluctantly coming. About 10 A.M. he had brought the Manchesters across from Hamilton's brigade, sending half to support Grimwood and the other half to support French. The newly-arrived Rifle Brigade were also moved across for the same purpose. A little later he sent Sir A. Hunter across to Grimwood's brigade to see if anything could be done. When General Hunter arrived at the position he found that the intensity of the firing had slackened off somewhat, and

that the men had mostly got good cover, and were holding their own without great difficulty. But the fight had become quite stationary, and there was plainly no prospect of a decided issue. On his return Sir G. White determined at about 11.30 to abandon the contest and withdraw his troops. The Gordon Highlanders were brought across from the left of Hamilton's brigade to Flag Hill, as a further support. General Hunter was sent back to Grimwood to convey the order for a general retirement in echelon from the left and to superintend and assist the operation. The wisdom of General White's decision may possibly be open to criticism. Three hours earlier, when the position first clearly declared itself, a withdrawal would have been a perfectly sound, if somewhat cautious, step to take. But after the hard fighting that had intervened, a retreat, however orderly, could only be interpreted by the enemy as an acknowledgment of defeat. Even if there was nothing to be gained it is conceivable that the mere holding of Grimwood's position till dusk, with the help of reinforcements, however exhausting to the men, might have had a considerable moral effect on the enemy.

The withdrawal, 12 M. Disorder of Grimwood's battalions.

The moment the men stood up to retreat it became evident that the lull which had taken place in the action was purely temporary. A perfect hail of bullets greeted the first signs of retirement, and a minute later the Boer field and automatic guns were playing fiercely upon the retreating companies. As long as Grimwood's battalions had remained under cover their losses had been trivial. But directly behind them an almost unbroken stretch of level plain extended to Ladysmith. Across the whole of this they were followed by a searching fire. The Maxim of the 1st King's Royal Rifles had to be abandoned, after being rendered useless by Lieutenant N. M. Tod, who had pluckily fought it to the last. In spite of the devoted efforts of Sir A. Hunter and some of the staff, the retirement soon lost all semblance of order. The two Rifle battalions were especially bad.* It is possible that the retirement was begun too

* It is only just to them, however, to point out that they had borne the brunt of the day's fighting after a long night march. The 1st King's Royal Rifles had scarcely had time to recover from Talana, where it had

hastily, and that it would have been better to have waited a little in order to bring some of Hamilton's brigade closer up in support. As it was, the bulk of Grimwood's brigade just dribbled in a straggling crowd through the extended files of the Manchesters and Liverpools, who held their ground firmly. For a moment the situation looked serious.

Situation saved by artillery. 13th and 53rd Batteries cover Grimwood's retreat.

But the field artillery proved equal to the occasion. On the right the 21st Battery, which had been pushed boldly forward into the dip between Lombard's Kop and the ridge which had just been evacuated, kept up a hot fire on the advancing Boers. It was only after both infantry and cavalry had got clear away that Major Blewitt fell back, getting his guns away safely under shelter of the thick scrub that covered the valley. But the honours of the day belong to the 13th Battery (Major Dawkins). This battery had, just before the withdrawal, been ordered up to the left of Grimwood's position by Sir A. Hunter, with the idea of creating an opening for a possible advance on Farquhar's Farm. It now took up a covering position in the open about 1000 yards in rear of the infantry. The moment the battery unlimbered it became the target, not only of a heavy fire from the Boer riflemen, but of an enfilading cross-fire from the Boer field-pieces and automatic guns on both flanks. Absolutely exposed, the men stood pluckily to their guns. Two guns were swung round to meet the cross-fire from the Boer artillery, while the remaining four pieces continued to cover the retreat of the infantry by playing on the Boers, who were now advancing in a series of short, determined rushes. Most of the Boer fire was now diverted on to the battery, and the infantry retired past it comparatively unmolested. The 13th now stood absolutely unsupported in the plain, with the whole Boer force in front and its own infantry streaming away behind it. At one moment it seemed that the guns were to be sacrificed to save the infantry. Men and horses fell fast; shell after shell

lost half its officers, and from the fatigues of the last night march into Ladysmith, while the 2nd King's Royal Rifles had before that spent Saturday night and Sunday on outpost work. Exception, too, should be made of one company of the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, under Captain Pearce-Serocold, which covered the retreat on the left with admirable steadiness.

burst between the guns, and the little percussion missiles from the "pom-poms," as they exploded in and round the battery, raised a dust that well-nigh hid the guns from view. But their fire never slackened. For a quarter of an hour the 13th sustained the whole Boer onset. Then the 53rd (Major Abdy's) galloped up through the fire and unlimbered on its right. Grimwood's brigade was now safe, and had passed through the supports. General Hunter, who was walking about unconcernedly among the guns of the 13th, ordered the artillery to retire. The 13th fell back first. Abdy's battery, whose timely arrival probably saved the 13th from destruction, now held back the enemy alone till the 13th had taken up position. As the 53rd started in its turn to limber up, the enemy's "pom-poms" plied it with renewed intensity. One gun was left behind, with its limber smashed and five out of six horses of its team shot. Seeing the smash, Captain Thwaites sent back to the wagons for a fresh team and wagon limber. As the battery fell back, another gun and limber overturned in a donga. The Boers were now swarming up close on every side, wherever the ground afforded a little cover. But Lieutenant Higgins and the gunners coolly unhitched and disentangled the team, righted the gun and brought it out safely at a gallop. The battery had just come into action again in its second position when the wagon limber under Bombardier Saunders dashed through the infantry, passed the battery, and under the concentrated fire brought out the abandoned gun.* The 42nd and 67th were hardly less severely engaged. While they were busy with the guns on Pepworth and to the north of Long Hill, which had reopened vigorously at the first signs of the retreat, one of the Boer guns, which had been opposing Grimwood, suddenly enfiladed them at 3000 yards range from Long Hill, and before the 67th could silence it the 42nd had lost an officer and several men killed and wounded. The covering of the retreat by the batteries was the one bright spot in one of the gloomiest days in the history of the British Army. Rarely have British batteries behaved better; they

* This limber was driven by Drivers Macpherson (lead), Darcy (centre), Stodderd (wheel), Limber-gunners Bright and Barron.

fell back generally at a walk, never more hastily than at a trot; yet the only support which they at first received was the little which they could afford each other while covering the withdrawal of the whole. A little later Colonel Mellor brought up the Liverpools on the right of the 13th and 53rd, and together with some of the Imperial Light Horse, under Major "Karri" Davies, did useful work in covering the general retreat.

Disorderly retirement of cavalry, 12.15 P.M.

When the infantry were clear the cavalry began their retirement. For reasons which it is difficult to understand, the cavalry were allowed to save themselves by their speed alone. No attempt was made at a judicious withdrawal by regiments. Troop officers were not even given the time to form their troops. A seething mass of clubbed and broken cavalry charged down the narrow nek on the west of Lombard's Kop and streamed southwards into the open plain, where, after a short interval, it collected and reformed itself.

Boers fail to follow up their advantage.

The Boers, who had already occupied Long Hill and the northern part of Grimwood's position, now swarmed over Bulwana, Lombard's Kop, and the ridges to the north of it. But here they stopped. For an enterprising enemy it was an opportunity for a vigorous counterstroke such as rarely occurs in war, and such as the Boers never had again. Hamilton's brigade, it was true, was untouched and unbroken, but the Boers could close on it in superior force from every side, from Bell Spruit on its left flank round to the Helpmakaar road on its right rear. It was the moment for a general to risk all to achieve a great end. But Joubert was not capable of such generalship, or else did not believe his men capable of executing it. He had already, fearing a feint on the part of the British, issued general orders against following up a British retreat. Whether he now added an express order checking his burghers is not clear. Many of them were certainly eager to push on and were with difficulty restrained by their officers. But the majority were no doubt content to have a reasonable excuse for leaving well alone. If the Boers had been led by a general, or if they had been Afridis, the issue of that Monday's fighting might have been very different. As it was they contented themselves with

pouring a disconcerting, but not very effective, artillery fire from all their guns and "pom-poms" on to the retreating troops.

Useful diversion by naval guns, 12.30 P.M.

At this moment an almost providential diversion occurred which did much to relieve the situation, and by its startling effect may have confirmed the Boers in their disinclination to push home their advantage. The naval brigade from the *Powerful* had reached Ladysmith about 9.30 to find the shells from "Long Tom" playing busily on the station buildings. With the admirable promptitude which marks every action of the British sailor, their 12-pdrs. were at once unloaded from their trucks, hitched up behind bullock teams and marched out to Limit Hill. They had barely got there when they received orders to retreat. As they did so "Long Tom" turned his attention to them. The second shot burst right under the wheels of the leading gun, overturning it and wounding all the crew. The gun was dismounted and left, and only brought in subsequently. The others took up a position on the open ground just north of Ladysmith, and at about 12.30 P.M. opened fire on Pepworth at a range of 6500 yards. In a very few rounds they effectively silenced "Long Tom" and the rest of the battery, which made no subsequent attempt to renew the contest. The moral effect of the arrival of artillery with range equal to that of the enemy's guns of position was great. It went far to counteract the feeling of panic which had pervaded the town when the first news from the battlefield had arrived.

Pathetic scenes in Ladysmith.

But the feeling of relief was but temporary. The civilian population realised that the gauntlet had been thrown down and accepted by the invader, and that the British troops had been worsted in the encounter. They foresaw that the isolation of the garrison would be but a matter of hours. The scenes in the streets were truly pathetic. Hundreds of loyal farmers had trekked with their wives and families into the town for security. These wretched people had piled into wagons all that they could save from their homesteads, and with women and children crowded into the few square feet beneath the tilts, stood outspanned in the slush and dirt of Ladysmith. Some of the women had sought shelter in the

already packed railway buildings, doubtless trusting in the protection that flimsy tin could afford against a 6-inch shell. Here were gathered a motley crowd waiting until a train could be found to carry them somewhere, anywhere, for they had no destination. Their homes were in the hands of the enemy, their future resting-place would be where chance might take them. Here were many families destitute and almost starving, which, in the first instance, had been robbed and driven from the Transvaal. The temporary haven afforded by Dundee had been denied them. Now in Ladysmith the terror of sudden death was once again driving them onward. The condition of the women, wan and weary with waiting, was pitiful in the extreme. The barbarity of war was more marked in the horror written on those pale faces herding in the station yard than in the mangled frames borne from the battlefield to the hospitals.

Rest of force retires at leisure. No attempt to help Carleton.

The rest of the retirement was now carried out at leisure, only the Devons being provisionally left on Limit Hill as the advanced post of the British position. But there was still much confusion and uncertainty. The Rifles never properly reformed, but dribbled into Ladysmith during the afternoon. No attempt was made to send any assistance to Carleton. Sir G. White and his staff would seem to have consoled themselves with the thought that the column could hold out till nightfall and then make its way back to Ladysmith. After the morning's experience of the Boer fighting power such optimism was unwarranted, and the neglect to take any measures can hardly be justified by the reflection that such measures would in any case have been too late. The news of Carleton's surrender was communicated to Sir G. White by General Joubert that same evening, with an intimation that the British might send out ambulances for the wounded.

Detailed story of Nicholson's Nek. The rendezvous.

The detailed story of that hapless force must now be told. The column, consisting of six companies (about 520 men) of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, Major Munn in command, five-and-a-half companies (about 450 men) of the Gloucestershire Regiment under Major Humphery, and No. 10 Mountain Battery (about 140 men), under Major Bryant, was ordered to rendezvous just beyond the outposts on the Newcastle road

at 10 P.M. on Sunday night. Besides the mules which carried the guns and ammunition of the mountain battery, there were about a hundred pack mules carrying two hundred rounds of reserve ammunition per man, a Maxim gun, two heliographs, and a few kegs of water—necessary precautions in view of the fact that the column might possibly have to be out for forty-eight hours. The command of the column was assigned to Colonel Carleton, but the conduct of the enterprise was mainly in the hands of his staff officer, Major Adye, who had devised the scheme and discussed its details with Sir G. White. Major Adye was well acquainted with the ground and was further assisted by the brothers Allison of the Corps of Guides, and by Mr. Hyde, whose farm was close to the road some two miles south of Nicholson's Nek. Every precaution was taken to prevent the enemy from discovering that a movement was contemplated. The orders enjoined that the strictest silence was to be observed on the march, that no smoking should be allowed, and that the men were to march as lightly and quietly as possible. Magazines were not to be charged, and the column, if fired upon, was to march straight on in silence without returning the fire. No stretchers were to be taken, and if casualties occurred the men were to be left as they fell until daylight. Officers and men were impressed with the idea that the chief difficulty and danger of the enterprise lay in passing through the Boer lines and reaching Nicholson's Nek unperceived, and that once they were there the rest would be comparatively simple. The Glo'sters and the mountain battery arrived at the rendezvous a little before the appointed hour. Owing to delay in drawing ammunition from the ordnance store, and to considerable difficulty in loading up their ammunition mules, which were newly issued and restive, and which the untrained men did not know how to handle, the Fusiliers did not arrive for an hour after the rest of the column. This delay was destined to have serious consequences. When the Fusiliers reached the rendezvous the officers were called to the head of the column and given final instructions. The force was to march straight along a track leading nearly due north for about seven miles, at the end of which it passed

through two white gates. Shortly after leaving the gates the column would arrive at its destination. The battery was then to take post on the far side of the Nek, while the Fusiliers occupied the hill on the right and the Glo'sters the hill on the left.

The night march. Carleton decides to occupy Tchrengula.

The advance took place about 11.15. The Irish Fusiliers led, followed by their ammunition mules. The battery was in the centre, followed by the mules of the Glo'sters. The last-named regiment brought up the rear. The night was dark and cloudy, but the men stepped out well, and in spite of occasional checks the pace kept up was good for night marching. After the third mile the most dangerous part of the march began, the road keeping close to the hillside which marked the edge of the Pepworth plateau and the right of the Boer centre. But the next mile and a half was traversed without mishap, and the column could congratulate itself on having passed, unperceived, through the Boer lines. About 2 A.M. Hyde's Farm was reached. Nicholson's Nek was now barely two miles off. But the guides were apparently afraid that the column, owing to the delay in starting, would be unable to reach the Nek before daylight. Accordingly Colonel Carleton and Major Adye decided to make use of the latitude contained in their instructions, and, instead of going any further, to take up a waiting position on Tchrengula hill immediately above the farm, moving on to the Nek as opportunity offered. They hoped thus to make sure of being securely posted before daylight, instead of running the risk of being discovered still on the road, and if all had gone well, the column would perhaps have been safer there than at Nicholson's Nek, inasmuch as it was nearer home. But though strictly within their orders the step taken by Colonel Carleton and Major Adye was a very considerable modification of the original plan as it seems to have been understood by Sir G. White. There were fully two hours more before dawn, and the order to occupy the Nek itself, "if possible," might perhaps have warranted running the risk of marching on, especially for a column whose whole object was to act the part of a forlorn hope.

The head of the column was now diverted sharply to the

Mules stampede during ascent of the hill.

left and advanced up the gently sloping ground in single file, one of the guides being left to mark the turning-point. Three or four hundred yards from the road the men struck the steep hillside and began laboriously clambering up over loose boulders, tripping and stumbling over each other in the dark. By the time the head of the column had scrambled nearly up to the crest, the long train of mules had reached the foot of the ascent, while the bulk of the Glo'sters were still on the road. Then suddenly the great mishap occurred. Whether the mischief was first started by the Boer *brandwacht* or patrol on the hilltop, or by rocks dislodged and rolled through the line either by Boers or accidentally by our own men, or by the mere huddling and consequent backing of men at some steep point, is not clear. In any case some sort of disturbance seems to have taken place in the ranks of the Fusiliers.* A number of them came running back down the hill crying out that "Boer cavalry" were on them. Immediately behind the Fusiliers were their restive ammunition mules. Scared by the tumult in front of them the mules were suddenly seized with uncontrollable terror. Kicking and squealing they broke loose from the inexperienced soldiers who led them, and stampeded right into the mules of the battery. In a moment all the mules of the column were stampeding madly to the rear. The Glo'sters heard the turmoil coming towards them and fixed bayonets, while some one in the rear of the column fired off a few wild shots. The next minute the crowd of frenzied animals charged through and through them. The men were knocked down senseless or hurled into a donga by the roadside. The mules, maddened by the shouting and the *mêlée*, tore down the valley into the darkness, and the last that was heard of them was the sound of ammunition boxes and panniers as they were splintered against the boulders.

Force assembles on hill-top without guns or reserve ammunition.

By a strenuous effort the officers succeeded in getting the men under control. A considerable number of the Fusiliers had been unaffected by the original scare and had gone on to

* The evidence as to the exact sequence of events is very conflicting, and it is possible that the disturbance in the Fusilier ranks was the consequence rather than the cause of the stampede of the mules.

the top of the hill. The rest now followed, and eventually what was left of the force was re-united on the summit about three o'clock. It was without guns, for though the battery recovered several of its mules, with parts of the screw-guns the gunners were unable to complete a single gun. The Glos'ters, however, had managed to save their Maxim. Except seventeen boxes, barely twenty rounds per man, all the reserve ammunition was lost. So were the water-kegs and the heliographs. Many men were missing, of whom some forty Glo'sters and seventy odd gunners found their way back to Ladysmith in the course of the morning.

Unwilling to abandon task Carleton decides to occupy S. end of Tchrengula.

The original scheme for the Nicholson's Nek operations had been hazardous enough. Its execution with the force now available, and after the Boers had been alarmed, was almost out of the question. The most prudent course would have been to have fallen back at once to the Ladysmith side of the Boer line, either by the road or, if it was too late for that, over Surprise Hill. From Bell's Farm or Surprise Hill the secondary object of the expedition, the covering of Sir G. White's left flank, could have been fulfilled equally well and without risk. But such a course was naturally distasteful to the two officers responsible for the expedition. The whole scheme was based on the assumption of the success of the main attack. It was not unreasonable to suppose that the force, which seemed to have pulled itself together fairly well, could hold out where it was till that success had been achieved; and even if it could not prevent the Boers checking the cavalry pursuit at Nicholson's Nek, it might do more to assist the pursuit from Tchrengula than if it were two or three miles further back. The southern end of Tchrengula was fixed upon as the point to hold and the force was marched across to it. A Kaffir was now sent back to Ladysmith with news of the mishap and of the position taken up by the column.

Description of Tchrengula. Mistake of only holding S. end.

Soon after the troops had reached the southern end of the plateau, Major Adye, in his capacity as staff officer, called together such officers as could be found. Pointing out in the darkness the direction in which lay the Boer positions and Ladysmith, he gave it as his opinion that it was unlikely that an attack would be made from the north, but that if any

attack was attempted it would come from the south and south-east, *i.e.*, from the direction of the Boer main position. Instructions were issued accordingly. The top of Tchrengula, as of most South African hills, formed an irregular plateau. Roughly speaking, this plateau was sloped like the sole of a boot with the toe pointing northwards. It was about a mile and a half long and varied in width. The southern end, or heel, was about five hundred yards across each way and rose in the centre to a knoll on which there were a few scattered trees and bushes. The middle, or instep, dipped down and was narrowed by a deep reëntrant on the eastern side and a shallower one on the western to less than three hundred yards. The northern half, or tread, widened gradually to about eight hundred yards, rising considerably in the middle, which thus formed a ridge on the skyline over which it was impossible to see from the south. This part of the hill was covered with high tufted grass, with occasional stumpy trees, and strewn with boulders. Dotted over the hilltop were several dilapidated sheep-kraals. The sides of the hill fell down almost precipitously round the "heel," but at the reëntrant and northwards the slopes were easier and broken up by dongas. On three sides the "heel" offered a good defensive position, at least against infantry attack. It was commanded by hills at a range of 1400 to 1800 yards, but the level ground between made any closer advance very difficult, except perhaps on the western side, which was freely dotted with bushes affording cover. The weak spot of the position was its northern side, which was commanded at about 1000 yards range by the crest of the rise on the northern half of the plateau. Hyde and the Allisons expressed the opinion that the attack would come from that side and urged that the crest should be held. There can be little doubt, speaking after the event and with the experience of the present war, that their advice was correct. From the northern end of the hill the enemy could have been kept at arm's length for a much longer time. As it was the Boers were able without effort and without exposure to a retarding fire to take possession of it at the very beginning of the fight, and from it, under cover of the grass and boulders on the tableland itself,

and of the minor reëntrants and irregularities of the slopes, to gradually work their way close up to the defenders. But to have occupied the northern end of the hill would have meant extending the defensive perimeter to be held by a force hardly amounting to one complete battalion of infantry to fully three miles, a wide departure from the past teaching of the British army. So certain, in fact, were the officers directing the operation of the satisfactory nature of the position taken up, and of the adequacy of the field of fire to the north, that no attempt was made to reconnoitre the ground, it being apparently assumed that the knowledge of it already possessed by Major Adye and by Mr. Hyde, on whose property the hill was, was sufficient for the purpose.

Disposition of troops. Column unable to communicate with Ladysmith.

The defence of the position was divided into two portions, the eastern side being assigned to the Irish Fusiliers and the western to the Glo'sters. Three companies (A, B and F) of the Fusiliers occupied the eastern crest of the hill facing towards the western foothills of Pepworth, from which the first attack was expected. Another company (E) held the adjoining half of the front edge of the "heel," while two companies (G and H), together with some of the residue of the men of the mountain battery, formed a reserve on the slightly higher ground in the centre of the position. Of the Glo'sters, A and B companies held the western crest of the hill. To the right of them, facing northward, was C company, roughly parallel to, but rather further advanced than E company of the Fusiliers. In rear of both these companies, and covering the gap between them, lay D company of the Glo'sters with the regimental headquarters. E company (Captain Stayner), and subsequently H company (18 men under Captain Willcock), were sent forward after daybreak about 400 yards to a slight rise from which they could command the reëntrants on both sides. In the absence of intrenching tools, the men were at once set to work constructing sangars or breastworks of piled stones in front of their positions. In the construction of cover the British soldier had learnt little since Majuba.* These sangars no doubt afforded secure

* See the criticisms on the British attempts at constructing cover at Majuba on p. 263 of Mr. T. F. Carter's 'History of the First Boer War.'

protection for a time, but they provided an excellent target for the Boers, and as long as some of them, by firing heavily at the tops of the sangars, kept the British lying down, the rest could creep forward unobserved. After a short inspection of these dispositions, Colonel Carleton and Major Adye took up their position under a tree near the southern extremity of the hill, in rear of the reserve companies of the Fusiliers, from whence they could command a view of their field of operations, of the Boer camp below Pepworth Hill, and of Sir G. White's movements in the main battle. At 9.30 the heliograph on Limit Hill could be seen trying to call up the column, but, owing to the loss of the heliographs, it was impossible to answer, and an attempt to signal with a flag failed to attract the attention of Sir G. White's signallers. Two Kaffirs were sent out by Colonel Carleton after this, but it is doubtful if they got very far. The actual wording of Sir G. White's order to retire on Ladysmith does not seem to have been flashed to Colonel Carleton till nearly midday, when retreat had long been out of the question.

Boers surprised. Christian de Wet promptly seizes N. end of hill.

To the Boers the night march of Carleton's column had come as a complete surprise. There was a small *brandwacht* of the Pretoria town commando to the east of Bell Spruit, almost opposite the point where the column turned off the road, but it seems to have noticed nothing till the stampede actually occurred. It then fired a few shots in the direction of the noise, and hurried back to give the alarm to the commando, which was camped north of Pepworth, near the foot of the hill known as Nodashwana. Field-Cornet Zeederberg and a strong detachment (subsequently considerably reinforced) at once rode across and took up a position on rising ground* about 1800 yards south-east of the end of Tchrengula. The noise of the stampede (or the report of the *brandwacht* on Tchrengula) simultaneously alarmed A. P. Cronje's Free State force camped near the Klip river west of Tchrengula. A number of the Free Staters, under Commandants Cronje and Nel, at once rode round and occupied Mount Pandi and Surprise Hill, to the west and south-west of the British, from which some of the bolder ones

* Marked as Klass Hill on the map.

made their way into the donga and bushy ground immediately west of Tchrengula. All these were merely to act as a containing force. Meanwhile Christian de Wet,* who, though only a simple burgher, seems to have taken the lead at once, and whose unerring instinct told him the right point to aim for, took 250–300 Heilbron burghers to the nek between the northern half of Tchrengula and the hill immediately south of Nicholson's Nek, and from there went up the reverse of the northern rise which the British had neglected to occupy. The key of the position was thus in Boer hands as soon as the fight opened.

4.45–11 A.M. Gradual advance of Boers, reinforced 8 A.M. by Johannesburg Police.

The first shots were fired about 4.45 A.M., as soon as it began to be light, and a desultory fire, chiefly from the south-west, was kept up for the next few hours. Meanwhile, De Wet's men were gradually wriggling forward among the rocks and grasses on the brow of the rise. About eight o'clock they were strongly reinforced. The Johannesburg police, about 400 strong, under Commandant Van Dam, had only arrived the preceding evening, and had been ordered by Joubert to take up a position on Tintwa Inyoni for the 30th. Van Dam soon saw he was no use where he was, and with the freedom that characterised the decisions of a Boer officer, ordered his men to saddle up and ride across to help De Wet. Galloping in small parties across the open valley of the Bell Spruit, the "Zarps" offered a fair target to the British, and Lieutenant Temple, in command of the Glo'ster Maxim, opened on them at about 1500 yards range, accompanied by a few volleys from the infantry. But in view of the need for husbanding ammunition orders were at once sent to stop firing at such long ranges. Disappearing round the shoulder of the hill the "Zarps" dismounted, and clambering up the reverse of the hill joined on to De Wet's left. The fire from the north was steadily increasing in intensity, creeping closer all the while to the advanced party

* The credit of this move seems rightly to belong to Christian de Wet. His brother, Piet de Wet, was, however, also present in command of some of the Kroonstad burghers whom he led with skill and courage up the W. side of the hill. In fact, almost up to his surrender in July 1900, Piet de Wet enjoyed a higher reputation as a leader than his brother.

of the Glo'sters. Crawling on their bellies through the deep grass, making short rushes from enclosure to enclosure and from stone to stone, the Boers steadily drew up closer. Under cover of their fire others meanwhile advanced unperceived round the edges of the hill into the rëentrants on both sides, waiting for their opportunity to open a murderous cross-fire. Van Dam and Christian de Wet, who led their men with great gallantry, were both wounded during this advance, but otherwise the Boers suffered very few casualties.

Useless volley firing.

One of the theories which dominated British musketry training before the war was that the soldier could not be trusted to fire independently without wasting his ammunition, and that the only fire that was of any value was volley firing by word of command. That it is impossible to shoot straight by word of command, or to take advantage of the momentary appearance of an enemy, or to shoot without being seen, are facts which the theory found convenient to neglect. The theory was now to be put to the test of experience. At first the soldiers fired whenever they saw a Boer expose himself on the slope. But Major Adye, anxious to save ammunition, repeatedly sent orders to stop the independent firing. Only volleys were to be fired, and then only if the Boers showed themselves in masses.* As the Boers never showed themselves more than one or two at a time, and never for a period long enough to give the necessary words of command and direct the soldiers' attention where to shoot, these orders, though not strictly carried out, only resulted in wasting ammunition and hampering the defence.

11.30 A.M. Retirement of advanced companies of Glo'sters.

Ever since about 8.30 it had become plain that the whole force of the Boer attack was coming from the north. But little attempt was made to alter the dispositions taken up at daybreak.† While the front was being close pressed more than half the force lined the almost unassailable rear of the position, exchanging a long-range fire with Boers on the

* However, somewhat later, Colonel Carleton seems to have sent orders to the Fusiliers to stop volley firing and fire individually.

† One of the reserve companies, Royal Irish Fusiliers, was moved to the right edge about 10 A.M., and its place taken by A company immediately behind it.

neighbouring hills. By eleven the advanced party of the Glo'sters, which, up to now, had borne the brunt of the attack, was beginning to be enveloped by the Boers, who were concentrating a very hot fire on it. Captain Willcock, who was wounded, sent back a sergeant to inform Major Humphery. The messenger returned at 11.30 with an order from Major Humphery, to whom Colonel Carleton had given a fairly free hand with regard to his dispositions, for E and H companies to retire on the long sangar occupied by C company immediately behind them. The moment the men rose from cover, a perfect tornado of rifle-fire broke out from among the stones in front and from the crest line on either flank, terribly mauling them as they crossed the open. The casualties in E company alone were nine killed and twenty wounded (including Captain Stayner) out of a strength of about sixty. Lieutenant McKenzie and a handful of E company, which had been detached to the left, failed to get the order to retire, and were cut off and made prisoners by some Boers who crept along the side of the hill and up the slope of the reëntrant to their rear, and shot into them as they lay on the ground, firing their rifles from their hips from a few yards' distance. Colonel Carleton, on being informed of this retirement, sent a written message to Major Humphery to order E and H companies, reinforced by another half company, to reoccupy their advanced position. As the two companies were now reduced to a mere handful of men, the idea of sending them out again would indicate that the true state of affairs in front was very far from being realised at headquarters. Major Humphery replied that it was impossible to send the men out again.

12.30. Retirement of C company Glo'sters owing to mistake.

By midday the defence had been driven back within the limits of the "heel" end of the plateau. Making use of the retreat of the advanced companies of the Glos'ters, the Boers had stalked close up to the position, lying hidden in places within two hundred yards and less of the sangars, pushing up especially boldly at the sides of the hill from where they could pour a flanking fire into the breastworks. The fire became hotter every minute, playing on the tops of the sangars "like a garden hose on to a flower-bed," to quote the

description of one of the officers present. Before long it drove most of E company of the Fusiliers out of their sangar, which had been badly constructed. They moved off to the right, thus leaving open the right front of the position.* The Glos'ters in the long sangar on the left front were better covered and for some time held their own, suffering comparatively slight loss. But B company in their left rear overlooking the steep western face of the hill was now being heavily attacked. About 12.30 the Boers crept up under the crest within fifty yards of the right of B company, and Lieutenant Knox, seeing the men round him all hit, ran back to try and get some more men. As he did so he waved his arms and shouted to Captain Willcock in the sangar to look to his flank, as the Boers were coming up from behind. By one of those unfortunate and irrevocable errors which so frequently occur in war the waving of the arm (a recognised signal for retirement), and the disjointed words that reached Captain Willcock in the din of the battle, were understood to convey an order to retire which had been passed up from behind. The order was passed on to the officers of C company, who, reluctantly abandoning the cover of the sangar, sent their men back singly and in pairs across the open grass sloping upwards behind them. The Boers were close up on every side and opened a merciless fire, killing or wounding more than a third of the men.† Captain Fyffe and Captain Willcock were wounded, the latter in several places. The rest dropped into such cover as they could find, a few stopping at a little kraal or rather heap of stones to the left front of D company's sangar, which Captain Fyffe had selected as a rallying point, the rest going on to the western and south-western edge of the hill.

1 P.M. Stampede of Fusilier reserves.

This was the beginning of the end. The defence was now driven right back to the central knoll, at the foot of which D company of the Glo'sters was still secure behind its sangar, which had not yet been taken in flank. The fire on the top of the knoll was intense, concentrating largely on the ill-

* According to some statements this movement preceded Captain Willcock's retirement.

† Out of a total of eighty-three men, C company lost thirteen killed and twenty-three wounded, nearly all during this retirement.

constructed sangars occupied by the reserve companies of the Fusiliers and by some of the unarmed gunners with their mules to their left. The mules and gunners now rushed back behind the crest of the hill. The Fusiliers had hardly had time to recover from the fatigues of the last march from Dundee. Rendered drowsy by the blazing South African sun after their sleepless night a great many had dropped asleep behind their sangars, and Colonel Carleton and Major Adye, who were only forty yards behind, had some difficulty in getting them to reply to the enemy's fire. About one o'clock Colonel Carleton, seeing men of the retiring companies of the Glo'sters dribbling past his left, and under the impression that A company of the Glo'sters were abandoning the brow of the hill immediately to his left, ordered Captain Silver to move half A company of the Fusiliers across, from the right of the reserve sangars. The men crossed the open steadily under a terrible fire. Unfortunately this movement, which looked like a falling back, combined with the sight of stragglers coming back on their left, started a panic among the Fusilier reserves. A number of them suddenly rose to their feet and came back in great disorder in front of Colonel Carleton. Nothing could stop them and they went right over the crest down the south reverse of the hill. Some of them threw away their rifles as they rushed right down to the foot of the hill. Here they offered a good target to the Boers on the hills beyond, whose fire drove them up to the crest again, where the rest had meanwhile been rallied by their officers and were lining the rear edge of the hill facing inwards.

1.15 P.M. White flag hoisted in outlying sangar.

The end came a few minutes later.* The retirement of C company of the Glo'sters had been well covered by its officers. The last to retire of these, Captains Duncan and Fyffe, and Lieutenant Beasley, were now collected with eight or ten men in the small broken-down enclosure already mentioned. Here they attempted to cover the retreat of the force, which they imagined, honestly enough—though perhaps they had no business to imagine—had altogether left the hill and was attempting to make its escape across the plain to the

* As much as three-quarters of an hour, according to some accounts, but perhaps not more than ten minutes.

south. From where they were not a single man nor the flash of a single rifle was visible, and though not seventy yards from D company's sangar, they could not see it, owing to a slight rise in the ground, and were absolutely unaware that it was still occupied. That such a mistake should be possible was one of those new features of lying down warfare which had not yet been realised. For some time they kept on firing, but the broken-down breastwork offered little protection. At last only Lieutenant Beasley and one or two of the men were firing, the rest were all killed or wounded. After a short consultation, Captains Duncan and Fyffe decided that they had done all in their power, and could honourably abandon the contest. A handkerchief, and then, as that seemed to have no effect, a towel was held up on a sword in token of surrender.

Carleton surrenders.

From D company's sangar the top of the white flag was just visible, and Major Humphery, who was a few yards behind the company, was almost immediately informed of it. He could also see Boers in front of the white flag, exposing themselves and waving their hats as a signal that they accepted the surrender. There can be little doubt that the right course for him was to see that the flag was immediately lowered at all costs. But readiness to assume responsibility is a quality that the training of the British Army has hitherto steadily striven to stamp out. Instead of acting himself, Major Humphery sent back Captain Conner, who had already run forward and seen what had happened, to inform Colonel Carleton, meanwhile telling the men immediately round him to hold their fire.* Captain Conner rushed breathlessly back to the little sangar behind which Colonel Carleton and Major Adye were lying. After a moment's discussion Colonel Carleton called for a bugler and ordered him to sound the "cease fire." The terrified bugler seemed unable to sound the evil signal. Three or four times he tried before he produced a call, and then out rang a note so quavering and strange as to give rise later to a rumour that the signal was first sounded by a Boer. A white rag was then held up on a rifle.

* Part of D company, however, kept on firing till some little while after the "cease fire" sounded.

Reasons for Carleton's action.

The reasons that led Colonel Carleton to accept the white flag raised by a handful of men in an isolated outpost as determining the surrender of the whole force are sufficiently intelligible. The front of the position had already been abandoned by everybody except D company of the Glo'sters. A few minutes more would see their ammunition run out and their sangar taken in flank. Once the last sangar was gone, the Boers would swarm over the knoll and shoot down like rabbits the men who were lining the crest. More than an hour before, Carleton had seen Sir G. White's beaten troops making their way back into Ladysmith. But for that he might perhaps have ordered down the white flag and held on to the last, or even attempted to rally the men on the crest, many of whom had not yet been seriously engaged, to make a bayonet charge* and sweep the Boers off the hill-top. But even that would not avert the inevitable end. Nor could he wish to complicate that end by a "white flag incident." Several Boers were already standing up opposite the white flag, while he and Major Adye were still discussing, and were advancing towards it with their rifles at the trail.† But apart from the reasons given, there is no ground for asserting that Colonel Carleton was forced into abandoning a defence which might otherwise have been prolonged for some hours, by the unauthorized act of a subordinate. If there had been any hope, there was ample time to have sent someone across to order the flag down and reverse the surrender, as on a later occasion at Spion Kop Colonel

* He had been discussing the possibility of such a charge with Major Adye just before the white flag was raised. There can be little doubt that any attempt at a charge would have failed.

† Evidence on this point is very conflicting, ranging from statements that no Boers moved or ceased firing till several minutes after the "cease fire" to assertions that the Boers were all among the Glo'sters as soon as Colonel Carleton received news of the white flag. The balance of evidence goes to show that, opposite the white flag, though nowhere else, some few Boers ceased firing and got up to move forward just about the time Captain Conner reached the headquarter sangar. It is possible that Carleton and Adye had not fully grasped the fact that the Glo'sters on the left had fallen back, and seeing Boers showing themselves where they had imagined the Glo'sters to be, jumped to the conclusion that the Boers were already among our men.

Thorneycroft by rushing to the front stopped the unauthorized surrender of some of his men. Or the white flag could have been simply neglected and the rest of the defence continued. The Boers had no reason to suppose that a towel held over a small stone heap not large enough to cover twenty men, and separated from the nearest point of the British line by 70 yards of bullet-swept open, could have any connexion with the rest of the force. The most they could reasonably expect was not to be fired at again from that same sangar.

The ethics of surrender.

The whole question of the ethics of surrender under the conditions of modern warfare is one of great difficulty. Napoleon in his Maxims will allow of no surrender except that of the individual who has been cut off and is unable to use his weapons. "All generals, officers and soldiers who capitulate in battle should be decimated," is his stern verdict, and he gives a true reason for it when he remarks: "How many seeming impossibilities have been accomplished by men whose only resource was death!" Such a rule can, perhaps, never be absolutely enforced, but it should be an army's pride to endeavour to keep it. In former times, before the rifle had been perfected, a force that was outnumbered could always by a last desperate bayonet charge save its honour and hope to inflict some loss on its enemy. In modern war there are situations where men without ammunition, and armed only with bayonets, are no better than men unarmed, or even where a force whose ammunition is unspent is absolutely helpless in face of overwhelming rifle and artillery fire. But as long as there is any possibility, by continuing the fight at whatever cost of life, of inflicting injury on the enemy or even of only delaying his movements, there can be little doubt that the struggle should be continued. And however slight the purpose resistance may seem to serve at the time it has still its moral value as an example. No matter how justifiable a surrender may be, its example may have an influence in other cases where the justification does not exist. To this ideal standard neither the junior officers who raised the first signal of surrender, when they might possibly for a few minutes longer have kept back the Boers from pursuing (as they imagined) the retreating force, nor the commanding officer,

who might at the cost of perhaps 200 more casualties have held out another half hour, and thus given an example which might have averted many surrenders yet to come, can be held to have attained. But there is nothing in the circumstances attending the surrender at Nicholson's Nek which make it more humiliating than many other surrenders that occurred after it, while there have been many instances where the struggle has been abandoned when there was much better hope of escape or relief.

Unwillingness of men to surrender. Boer kindness to prisoners.

To return to the actual surrender. For some minutes the bugles sounded the "cease fire" before the firing could be stopped on the right. The companies of Fusiliers on the south-eastern crest of the hill had suffered little and still had plenty of ammunition. The slight rise in the middle of the position sheltered them from the main Boer attack, of whose proximity and deadliness they had no notion. To them the surrender came as a complete surprise. For a while they refused to believe their own ears and fired away fiercely. The word was passed down their line to "fix bayonets and die like men." But it was too late. Officers broke their swords in bitter indignation as the Boers now walked confidently into their lines and began disarming their men. Colonel Carleton handed over his sword to Commandant Steenkamp, in command of the Heilbron burghers. In the moment of their triumph the Boers behaved with the same courtesy and unaffected kindheartedness which they had shown at Majuba, and which they displayed after most of their victories. Though exultant they were not insulting. They fetched water and blankets for the wounded, and treated the prisoners with every consideration. The latter, about 850 altogether, including many of the lightly wounded, after being disarmed, were marched down to Joubert's laager. That same evening they were driven in wagons to Waschbank Station, where they entrained for Pretoria. The total casualties at Nicholson's Nek were about 46 men killed and 130 men and 8 officers wounded. The Glo'sters suffered most heavily, losing 33 men killed, and 5 officers and about 75 men wounded, or about 27 per cent. of their strength on the hill.

Many causes contributed to the disaster at Nicholson's

Boers won on their fighting merits.

Nek. Colonel Carleton was sent on an almost hopeless errand, and his steps were dogged by misfortune. Once he took up a position on Tchrengula he could hope to do nothing more than hold out till relieved or till nightfall gave him a chance of breaking his way back into Ladysmith. That hope failed. The history of that failure has been set forth in detail almost disproportionate to the general scope of the present work. But the detail may have helped to bring out the real cause of this failure—as of so many another—the tactical inferiority, in 1899, of the British soldier to the Boer. Nicholson's Nek showed that that inferiority had diminished but little since Majuba. No one can read Mr. Carter's vivid narrative of the fight on Majuba and then read the account of Nicholson's Nek without feeling that the two are but slightly different variants of the same story. On the British side there is the same failure to occupy advanced positions from which the enemy could have been kept at arm's length, the same crowding of men at points that were never assailed, the same inability to modify the dispositions to meet the actual attack. The sangars which directed the Boers where to concentrate their fire and sheltered them from observation, the harmless volleys which told them when it was safe to advance, the driving in of the advanced party, the crumbling away of the resistance during the last half hour under a fire growing ever hotter and hotter—the outlines of the two stories correspond. So, too, on the Boer side. Like Smit, whom he had followed up the slopes of Majuba, De Wet at once saw where the weak spot lay and rode his men round to it; what follows—the long hours of intermittent firing, during which the Boers picked off those who showed themselves incautiously, while they themselves invisibly crawled forward till they had enough men up to establish an overwhelming fire superiority at close range, the sudden development of intense continuous fire, all but the last shameful shooting down of hunted men—are the same. That last scene was averted by surrender. It was a contest of riflemen against riflemen, and the better men won. It is true that the Boers were more numerous, but of the 3000 or more that in some sort took part in the engagement, 1000 men at the most actually attacked

the hill. How many battalions of British infantry, unaided by artillery, would it have required to capture 1000 Boers surrounded in a similar position ?

"Mournful Monday" first real test of Boer fighting quality.

What is true of Nicholson's Nek is true in no small degree of the whole of the operations of that "Mournful Monday." The Boers won on their fighting merits. Their mobility completely paralysed the cumbrous tactics of their opponents. Their extended order and skill in the use of cover frustrated the immense superiority of the British in artillery. The volume and intensity of their fire checked all attempts to force a way through the invisible containing net of riflemen. The fact that fully a third of the forces on either side were never engaged, and that the British casualties, apart from Nicholson's Nek, were insignificant,* did not diminish the moral effect of the engagement. The battle of Ladysmith was the first engagement on a large scale between British troops and Dutch burghers, and the first in which the two military systems were fairly matched against each other. And it showed conclusively that in the open field 12,000 British troops were not a match for an equal number of Boers.

* The British casualties on October 30 were—Officers killed: 1st King's Royal Rifles, Major Myers, Lieutenants Marsden and Forster; 42nd Battery, R.F.A., Lieutenant MacDougall; Natal Mounted Rifles, Lieutenant Chapman; Royal Army Medical Corps, Major Gray. Officers wounded: 1st King's Royal Rifles, Lieutenant Johnson; 2nd King's Royal Rifles, Major Buchanan-Riddell; Royal Irish Fusiliers, Captains Rice and Silver, and Lieutenant Dooner; Glo'sters, Captains Willcock, Fyffe, Stayner, Conner and Duncan; 13th Battery, R.F.A., Major Dawkins; 69th, R.F.A., Lieutenant Belcher. Of other ranks 57 killed and 245 wounded. Forty-three officers and 925 men were officially reported missing. Apart from Nicholson's Nek the casualties were very little larger than those of Rietfontein and much less than at Talana or Elandslaagte, the bulk of them falling on the two Rifle battalions and the Leicesters. In fact, in the main battle it is possible that the Boer casualties were for once heavier than the British. For though they were officially reported as 11 killed and 67 wounded, Dr. Raymond Maxwell, who was present, states that this figure only represents the losses on Pepworth. The total casualties for the day were probably some 20 killed and 200 wounded. Among the killed was Dr. Hohls, head of the Boer ambulance, struck as he bravely knelt down to bind up a wounded artillerist under a hail of shrapnel. Van Dam of the Police, Christian de Wet, and Colonel Blake of the Irish Brigade were among the wounded.

Causes of failure largely inherent in character of British force.

It is not difficult to point out specific reasons for the failure of "Mournful Monday." They have been brought out sufficiently in the course of the narrative. But it would be a grave injustice to Sir G. White and the officers under his command to dwell only on their mistakes, without setting forth the underlying causes of their failure—causes inherent in the constitution and character of the force at their disposal, and in the peculiar conditions which they were the first to encounter. It must be remembered that, before the war, military opinion was unanimous in the belief that, though the Boers might gain successes in smaller operations, their want of discipline and staff organization, and the absence of trained leaders, would prevent their making full use of their numbers. In other words, that, though a thousand Boers might defeat a thousand British, ten thousand British, duly equipped in all "the three arms," were a practically invincible force. After Talana and Elandslaagte had shown that British troops could win in the smaller actions, Sir G. White not unnaturally hoped for success in the larger. It is from this point of view that his failure has an interest and importance in the history of the war which the battle of Ladysmith hardly merits as an engagement in itself.

Advantages of higher organisation not on side of British.

As a matter of fact the magnitude of the forces on both sides, so far from being a disadvantage to the Boers, was, in some respects, all in their favour. The extended formations made possible by the power of the modern rifle have given an enormous advantage to mobility and individual initiative, and the larger the force, and consequently the larger the front occupied, the greater that advantage is bound to be. Instead of attempting to dash directly in front against some portion of the Boer line—a policy by which his force could have been kept together, but which, as many subsequent engagements showed, was not unlikely to end either in failure or in the costly capture of a useless position—Sir G. White, on this occasion, decided to meet the wide extension of the Boers by a wider extension of his own force, in the hope that he might roll up the whole Boer position from its flank. But for this task the instrument with which he had to work was but ill-adapted. A slight change in the Boer dispositions

caused the blow on their left flank to be struck at empty air, and before the clumsy British force had begun to rearrange itself, the Boers had completely enveloped it and forced it back on the defensive. For the Boers it was but the matter of a few minutes to meet the situation by prolonging their line for three or four miles. But for Sir G. White to bring his slow-moving infantry from one flank to another was a very different business, and though it is fair to criticise him for not doing something more definite once the situation plainly declared itself, it is also fair to remember how slow and how obvious to the enemy any change of dispositions would have been. Nor was it mobility alone which enabled the Boers to adjust their dispositions with so little delay. If the British commanders on the right had possessed the same immediate grasp of the situation that characterised the Boers, and the same readiness to modify orders which no longer had a direct application, the battle might perhaps have resulted very differently. But such initiative was not part of the British system. Again, quite apart from the question of the advantages of greater elasticity and initiative, "Mournful Monday" failed to show that superiority of British staff organization over the haphazard Boer methods that was so confidently expected. It is true that, owing to want of central direction, a good many Boers remained inactive behind Long Hill and round the slopes of Pepworth, while no attempt was made to push home the success gained. But when one considers the series of misunderstandings and blunders that made up what Dr. Conan Doyle has well described as a "scrambling, inconsequential, unsatisfactory action," the want of decision with which after the changed situation became clear the battle was allowed to proceed aimlessly for several hours till it ended in a withdrawal, that on friend and enemy alike left the impression of a rout, the general paralysis following the retirement amid which the column isolated on Tchrengula was abandoned to its fate, it is not so easy to make out on which side lay the advantage of superior organization. The fact is, that the mere existence of an elaborate framework for the devolution of authority may be a hindrance rather than a help if that framework has

not by previous experience and practice been converted into a perfect instrument. It was only one of those characteristic self-delusions, which ran through the whole British Army system, to suppose that a force whose component parts were hastily brought together, whose general and staff were new to each other, to the regimental officers, and not least to the task of handling so large a body of men even in manœuvres, was an efficient fighting unit simply because the different duties had been duly distributed on paper.

General criticism of preceding operations.

The same confusion in the arrangement of details and weakness of purpose that prevailed on "Mournful Monday" had, to no small extent, marked the whole of the British operations in Natal since the outbreak of war. The conduct of the campaign during these nineteen days fluctuated between confidence, at times appalling in its rashness, and almost inexplicable hesitation and alarm. It is difficult to realise that the hurried retirement after Elandslaagte, and the abandonment of the intended night attack of October 27, could be part of the same military policy which allowed General Symons to stay at Dundee, which neglected to destroy the railway in front of the Boer advance, which sent two weak battalions of infantry to the rear of the whole Boer army. In comparison with the British operations the Boer advance, with its calm disregard of the partial checks inflicted at Talana and Elandslaagte, its successful concentration in front of Ladysmith, and its confident offensive-defensive tactics, cannot be said to demonstrate any striking strategic inferiority. Here again the conclusion to be drawn is not that an unorganized army can be as well manœuvred as an organized one, but that battalions hastily collected in one spot are not an organized army, that red gorgets and staff caps do not make a staff, or long and honourable service in the army a great general. But it is not on Sir G. White, or on the officers of his staff, or the force under their command, that criticism should be directed, so much as on the whole system under which they were hurriedly thrown together. Nor should it be forgotten that the situation which Sir G. White was called upon to face in Natal during those few weeks was one of greater difficulty and responsibility than that which

confronted any other general in the course of the war, that his force was relatively smaller, and that he had no time for preparation. If he erred, his mistakes were less grievous than those of others who had the opportunity of learning from his experience; if he hesitated, he, at any rate, never lost heart.

Moral effect of battle on whole of Afrikanderdom.

The moral effect of the battle of Ladysmith, at this period of the war, was almost incalculable. However great the confidence of the Boers in their military prowess, Talana and Elandslaagte had excited misgivings which a crushing defeat in front of Ladysmith might have converted into a general panic. Now, with one clear sweep, the horizon of doubt was cleared. It was a profound satisfaction, a relief from disquieting anxiety, rather than the exultation of unexpected success that reigned in the Boer laagers after the battle, and that breathed through the Biblical eloquence of General Joubert's despatch to Pretoria. But not even the reports from the battlefield could compare in their effect with the indisputable evidence of nearly a thousand British prisoners as they passed the stream of reinforcements and of laggards coming down to join the army of invasion, and marched to their prison through the streets of Pretoria. From the day that the British prisoners marched into Pretoria, a new and far-reaching impetus was given to the war. The news, travelling with instantaneous rapidity through the length and breadth of South Africa by those underground channels whose rapidity and accuracy so often baffled the comprehension of loyalists and soldiers, thrilled the whole structure of Afrikanderdom to its foundations. In the Republics, cautious burghers who, doubting the issue, had malingered in their homes, took down their rifles from the wall and hastened to join their commandos. Colonial Boers who had shut their ears to the pleading of republican emissaries, and had just begun to congratulate themselves on their prudence, now turned rebel and rode across the border, or formed themselves into committees for the invitation and reception of the hesitating Free State forces, and for the organising of local commandos. In Europe the Transvaal Agency was flooded with the applications of adventurers

eager to take a share in the overthrow of the British power.

In England Nicholson's Nek borne calmly, but full extent of reverse not realised.

In England, largely owing to the misguided zeal with which the military press censorship bowdlerised Sir G. White's defeat into a "reconnaissance in force," * the full significance of the battle of Ladysmith was not understood then, or for many weeks afterwards. The disaster of Nicholson's Nek, indeed, could not be concealed. But the brave message in which Sir G. White announced the mishap and claimed the whole responsibility for himself disarmed all criticism, and the greatest reverse that had befallen the British arms since Majuba was borne with a fortitude and self-restraint that did credit to the sober judgment of the British public. Whether it might not have been better in the end if the Government and the nation had been more seriously alarmed is another question. It is evident from the announcement, published immediately after the receipt of the news, that three additional battalions and a mountain battery would be despatched to make up for the losses incurred, that Nicholson's Nek was treated as a mere accident, and that no doubt had yet arisen as to the sufficiency of Sir Redvers Buller's main army to fulfil its task.

White decides to let himself be invested.

The actual situation in Natal was far more serious than was realised anywhere outside of Ladysmith. Whatever consoling descriptions the press correspondents may have been allowed to apply to the main battle along the Modder Spruit, Sir G. White seems to have accepted it as conclusive proof of the superiority of the Boers in the field. No attempt to upset the verdict of "Mournful Monday" by another general engagement was contemplated, and the Boers were left in undisputed possession of the heights which dominated Ladysmith from north and east. It could only be a matter of a few days before the Boers cut Sir G. White's communications with the south. It was therefore necessary to decide at once whether he should remain in Ladysmith and allow himself to be invested, or abandon the town and fall back

* This term, like "regrettable incident," "having effected his object," and similar phrases, soon came to have a very definite meaning for those who were initiated in the ways of the censorship.

behind the Tugela. Sir G. White unhesitatingly chose the former alternative. Sir Redvers Buller, who had reached Cape Town on October 31, telegraphed his acquiescence in this decision, though he hinted somewhat indefinitely that the line of the Tugela offered a tempting prospect.

Reasons justifying his decision.

Sir G. White has been severely criticised for sitting still and permitting the "entanglement of Ladysmith" to come to pass. But a consideration of the difficult problem which he had to face tends to show that it would have required a very great soldier to have risen superior to the reasons that determined Sir G. White's action. The strategic advantages of the Ladysmith base, the relative weakness of the line of the Tugela, the enormous moral and military gain that the Boers would derive from the possession of the largest town in Northern Natal and the key of their disconnected railway systems, have been dwelt on in a previous chapter. The first of these considerations no longer applied, since the British force was proved incapable of holding its own in the field, but the others still remained in force. Moreover, after October 30 it was impossible to abandon Ladysmith without sacrificing the greater part of the immense mass of stores and ammunition accumulated there. The retirement to the Tugela would in itself be a difficult and dangerous task, and if the Boers pressed the retreat close, the small and wearied British force would have but little time in which to take up a defensible position on the south bank, and even if it escaped a disaster might be pressed to abandon the Tugela as hastily as it had abandoned Ladysmith. These considerations and the expectation that the main strength of the Boer invasion would spend itself on an ineffectual attempt to take Ladysmith, thus leaving the rest of Natal in peace, no doubt confirmed Sir G. White in his resolve to remain where he was.

At the same time he ruined the plan of campaign, though possibly this was a blessing in disguise.

At the same time Sir G. White's action made complete shipwreck of the prearranged plan of campaign. By suffering himself to be invested he reduced what had been the Field Army of Natal to the level of a mere garrison—"an ensign on a hill"—capable only of holding its own till relieved from outside. To prevent the spread of the Boer invasion and to

rescue the Ladysmith garrison from capture or starvation the Army Corps was broken up, and another field army, eventually three times as large as Sir G. White's own force, had to be collected in Natal, and hurled again and again, with heavy loss, against the iron ring of hills that lay between Sir G. White and the outer world. Sir G. White could not have foreseen Colenso or Spion Kop, yet he must have known, after his own experience of the Boers on "Mournful Monday," that the relief of Ladysmith would be no easy task. To add this task to Sir Redvers Buller's other burdens was, even after all allowances are made, an act of weakness whose truest explanation lies in a system of military training which strictly discouraged initiative and self-reliance. When one remembers how Napoleon deliberately sacrificed the whole of his siege-train at Mantua in 1796 in order to retain the mobility of his force in the field, it is difficult to believe that a general of his insight and self-confidence would not have preferred to incur any sacrifices sooner than allow himself to be immured. If Sir G. White had fallen back, first on Colenso, and then, step by step, if necessary, even as far as Maritzburg, destroying the railway and clearing the country of stock and produce in front of him, he might well have kept the superior Boer forces engaged till General Buller's main army had entered Bloemfontein. It must be remembered that the strategical mobility of the Boers, especially at this stage of the war, was far less than their tactical mobility, so that there was little fear of Sir G. White being rushed by their pursuit, and that they would be advancing into a hostile country in which they would have had to detach men to guard their communications, while Sir G. White's force would, as it slowly fell back, be strengthened by Natal volunteers anxious to protect their homes, and by as many men as General Buller could spare from the main advance, till it was strong enough to take up a permanent defensive position at some suitable point, *e.g.*, along the hills north of Mooi River. Eventually, when the advance to Bloemfontein relieved the pressure in Natal, and additional reinforcements had come out from England, Sir G. White might have felt strong enough to turn the tables on the Boers and begin his advance.

However, Lord Roberts has expressed his approval of the course taken by Sir G. White, and one may well doubt if any other British general placed in the same position would have acted otherwise. It is at least arguable that the strategically less sound policy avoided the possibly serious effect upon Cape Colony of a hasty evacuation of Ladysmith before the arrival of the Army Corps, and that the very breaking up of the Army Corps, and the series of checks that followed, proved a blessing in disguise by averting the disaster that might have followed upon a march to Bloemfontein with an inadequate force.*

Mistake of not sending out cavalry, or attempting to hold larger perimeter.

But admitting the strength of the reasons which may be urged in justification of Sir G. White's general policy of retaining Ladysmith, one may fairly find ground for adverse criticism in the details of the steps taken by him. His refusal to send his splendid cavalry force south of the Tugela was a grave error. This step was strongly urged by General French and Sir A. Hunter, but Sir G. White, apparently not realising that there was no longer any object in retaining any part of the Natal Field Force that was not essential for garrison purposes, insisted on their remaining in Ladysmith. Based on Colenso and Chieveley the cavalry could have done invaluable work in preventing Boer raids across the river and have greatly facilitated the task of the relieving force. In Ladysmith they were far less use than outside. They added to the number of mouths to be fed, and the presence of so many horses in a confined space was largely responsible for the insanitary condition of the town and the consequent sickness which so greatly reduced the garrison. The only step Sir G. White took in order to cover Natal and keep in British hands the important passage of the Tugela, the key to the relief of Ladysmith, viz., the sending down to Colenso on October 31 of the Dublin Fusiliers and the Natal Field Battery, was entirely inadequate. A discussion of the actual defensive positions taken up round Ladysmith belongs more properly to the chapters in which the historic siege of that town is dealt with, but it is difficult not to feel that a certain timidity was shown in the uncontested abandon-

* See Vol. I., p. 10.

ment of outlying positions which might have been held, at any rate for a time, and whose retention would have afforded a larger grazing ground, and made it more difficult for the enemy to complete the investment. This was especially the case with regard to Bulwana, the great flat-topped mountain about 7000 yards south-east of Ladysmith. The retention of Bulwana would have forced the Boers to extend enormously their investing line, and have protected Ladysmith from all artillery fire from east and south-east. As it was, the Boers took possession of it, and to the surprise of Sir G. White's staff, who seem to have learnt nothing from the lessons of Pogweni, Impati and Pepworth, dragged up one of their great cannon, with which they effectively shelled the town for many weary months.

CHAPTER VII

THE BREAK UP OF THE ARMY CORPS

Operations on western field. Less dramatic, more successful.

THE operations on the western field of war, during the opening weeks of the war, possess little of the dramatic interest of the campaign in Natal. They are marked by no thrilling victories and by no disastrous defeats, by none of the glamour of the struggle on Elandslaagte Hill, or the bitterness of Mournful Monday. In their stead we see, along the eight hundred miles of western border, a confused series of skirmishings, patrollings with armoured trains, wreckings of bridges and culverts, out of which, after a while, emerge the two clear facts of the sieges of Mafeking and Kimberley; and, along the Orange River, a complete inactivity for nearly a month, followed by an unopposed triumphant entry of the Free Staters into the border districts of Cape Colony, amid enthusiastic demonstrations of welcome from a population enjoying all the privileges of British citizenship. Nevertheless, these operations were of no small importance in determining the course of future events, and the mere fact that they resulted in as complete success as could well be hoped for, in view of the great numerical inferiority of the British forces, ought to lend additional interest to the consideration of the original strategical dispositions and of the character of the forces employed. As regards the latter it is worth noting that, while the policy of "bluff" along the railway from Stormberg to Orange River Bridge was carried out by Imperial troops, the actual brunt of the fighting along the frontier from Kimberley to Tuli fell almost entirely on locally organized forces, commanded by comparatively junior Imperial officers. The details of the strategy adopted have been discussed in an earlier chapter, but it is worth pointing

out again that it was a strategy based, not on general military principles, but simply and solely on a true insight into the political situation and into the character of the enemy. When one compares its results with that of the strategy in Natal, which, while allowing itself to be prejudicially influenced by political considerations, showed little signs of being inspired by any knowledge of the Boers, one cannot help wondering whether, if the whole direction of the defensive operations in South Africa, preceding the arrival of the army corps, had been left under the control and guidance of the High Commissioner, aided by a few junior colonels of the stamp of Baden-Powell, the result would not have been more successful.

Mafeking. Cronje and Baden-Powell.

The first objective of the Boer forces on the western border was Mafeking. Within a few hours' ride of the little township lay nearly eight thousand Boers, with ten guns, under Cronje. No Boer general was more popular among his countrymen than swarthy Piet Cronje. The Young Afrikanders were never tired of contrasting his fearlessness, his truculent and stubborn energy, and his dour patriotism, with the timidity, the hesitation, and the pro-Uitlander tendencies of the Commandant-General. Twice already—at Potchefstroom in 1881, and at Doornkop in 1896—Cronje had seen the hated "rooinek" hoist the white flag in token of submission to his forces, and neither he nor his burghers doubted but that a few days would see a third submission added to the list. They had still to try conclusions with a certain lieutenant-colonel of dragoons, whose name had not yet become a household word wherever the English tongue is spoken, but who had already travelled and fought in many countries, and knew South Africa from Zululand to the Zambesi. The force Baden-Powell had with him was a mere handful—irregular mounted infantry, just learning to hold on to their saddles, Cape, Rhodesian, and Protectorate police, and a scratch selection of volunteers and town guard, with half-a-dozen antiquated little muzzle-loaders for artillery—but animated with a spirit of confidence in themselves, and in the courage and resourcefulness of their leader, that was to prove of more worth than numbers or

training, or batteries of field artillery, and to frustrate Cronje's hopes and the whole Boer plan of campaign in the west.

Baden-Powell's preparations.

The history of the siege of Mafeking forms an episode by itself. For the present it is only necessary to touch on as much of it as bears on the general military situation. In the short time available after the concentration of his force at Mafeking, Baden-Powell had set to work to construct a series of intrenchments, which, though only partially completed when the siege began, proved sufficient to check the first Boer advance. These incipient field-works were supplemented by an elaborate system of mines, mostly imaginary, which served to frighten off the Boers from any attempt to rush the village, while the real defences were being worked at under fire. Armoured trains had been secretly constructed in the railway works, and one of these, the *Mosquito*, under Lieutenant Nesbitt, with twenty men of the Protectorate Regiment and a Maxim, was sent down to Vryburg to fetch a couple of 5-inch Howitzers that Baden-Powell hoped to get sent up from Cape Town. As a matter of fact, all that Cape Town had to offer were two antiquated muzzle-loading 7-pounders, that had been fished up out of the recesses of the ordnance stores. The Howitzers owed their imaginary existence to some error in the sending or deciphering of a code telegram. That same night, after telegraphic communication with Kekewich at Kimberley, Baden-Powell sent down a train to fetch the detachment of seventy Cape Police stationed at Kraaipan, thirty-three miles down the line. All women and children who were desirous of leaving Mafeking had already been sent down in the course of the day.

Oct. 12. Boers cross frontier. Capture of armoured train.

These precautions were taken none too soon. Cronje was not minded to waste time like Joubert. A large part of the commandos had already been moved forward, and were lining the border opposite Mafeking along a front of thirty miles or more. The ultimatum expired at five o'clock on the 11th. Soon after midnight the burghers rode forward and crossed the border. While the main body advanced slowly from Rooigrond directly towards Mafeking, strong contingents of the Rustenburg and Marico burghers rode rapidly forward, tearing up the railway line nine miles north of Mafeking,

and seizing and thoroughly sacking the old Protectorate camp at Ramathlabama. Another strong force of Lichtenburgers under De la Rey crossed the border twenty-five miles south of Mafeking, and made a rapid dash on Kraaipan in order to catch the police. In this they were disappointed, but they had not long to wait for their first success. Meanwhile they spent the day in damaging the railway for some distance to north and south of the station. Late in the evening the *Mosquito*, coming back from Vryburg with the two guns and a quantity of ammunition, ran over the gap in the track and ploughed its way to a standstill across the open veld. The Boers surrounded it, and a desultory fight was kept up all night. But De la Rey had in the meantime sent up for his artillery under Van der Merwe, and when it arrived in the morning the fate of the handful of men in the train was sealed. After the first few shells Nesbitt, who, with eight or nine of his men, was wounded, raised a white flag and surrendered.

Oct. 13–31. Operations round Mafeking.

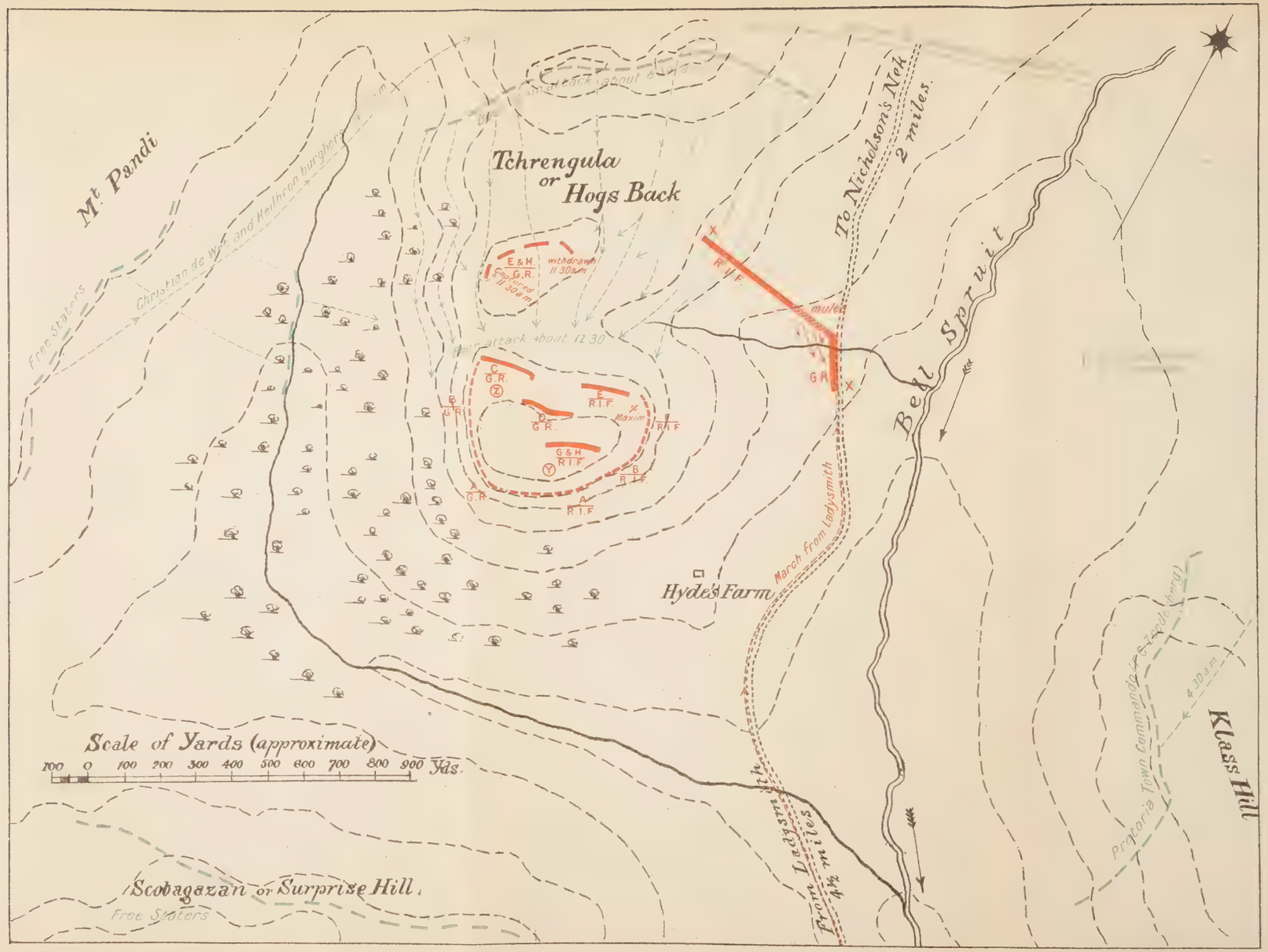
On the 13th, De la Rey's men moved northwards, destroying the line as they rode along, while other detachments from the Rooigrond force began wrecking the line south of Mafeking to within four miles of the town. On the same day two truck-loads of dynamite which were discovered lying in Mafeking Station, were for safety sent out of the town by Baden-Powell. They were fired upon at a siding six or seven miles north of the town, whereupon the engine-driver, Perry, coolly uncoupled his engine and steamed back. A few minutes later the trucks blew up with a terrific explosion, scattering the debris over their intending captors. This incident only helped to intensify the fears Baden-Powell had roused by skilfully disseminated reports as to the extent to which the country round Mafeking was honeycombed with mines. But Baden-Powell was not inclined to put all his trust in Boer credulity, and determined to teach the Boers a real respect for the fighting power of his little force. Early on the 14th he sent out an armoured train under Captain Williams, and a squadron of the Protectorate Regiment under Captain FitzClarence (afterwards reinforced by an additional troop and a 7-pounder, under Lord Charles Bentinck) to attack the

Capture of
COLONEL CARLETON'S COLUMN
October 30 1899

DIRECTIONS

- British
- Boers
- R.I.F. ..... Royal Irish Fusiliers
- G.R. ..... Gloucestershire Regiment
- X X. ..... Formation at moment of stampede
- Y. ..... Colonel Carleton & Major Adye
- Z. ..... Sangar where white flag was hoisted

The British positions given are those held up to 11·30 a.m.



Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London.

Boers who were breaking up the line a few miles north of the town. A stiff fight followed, lasting for about four hours, but although the Boers brought up a 7-pounder and a "pom-pom," and largely outnumbered the British, they had decidedly the worst of the engagement.* This sudden, vicious "kick" on Baden-Powell's part came as a considerable surprise to the Boers, who were quite unprepared for such a reception, and had a lasting moral effect. One result of it was that the remaining 6-inch siege gun at Pretoria was immediately telegraphed for. But the odds against Baden-Powell were too great to allow him to attempt to check the advance of the main Boer force. On the morning of the 16th the Rustenburg and Marico burghers began shelling the town from the north-east, and pushed on to within 2500 yards of the defences without drawing a reply from the garrison. By nightfall the Boers had pitched their laagers close to Mafeking on every side and the siege began. An invitation to surrender, which had already been sent in that day, was formally repeated by Cronje the next morning and politely rejected. During the next week Mafeking was busy intrenching itself and burrowing into the ground for shelter, while the Boers, who showed no spirit for attack, contented themselves with occasional skirmishes, and pushed up their trenches somewhat closer. On the 23rd the "Long Tom" from Pretoria arrived, and for the next two days the town was steadily shelled by the whole of the Boer guns. But the preparations made had been thoroughly effectual, and the great 94-pounder shells which had just been proving so terrifying in Dundee could do nothing to the securely sheltered little garrison. A half-hearted attack on the native "stad" which accompanied the bombardment of the 25th was easily checked. On the night of the 27th, Mafeking replied by a vigorous sortie against the advanced Boer trenches, which were cleared at the point of the bayonet. On the 31st the

* The British casualties were 2 killed and 16 wounded. As regards the Boer losses, Baden-Powell seems to have been informed that he killed 53 and wounded a proportionate number. The diary of an English doctor who was present acquiesces in the Boer official reckoning of 2 killed and 6 wounded, while a correspondent of the *Standard and Diggers' News* puts the total at 60 casualties.

Boers made an attempt to capture Cannon Kopje, a hillock 2000 yards south of the town and the key of the whole defence, but were driven back with loss. Altogether, as a result of nearly three weeks of war, the main body of the Boers found itself sitting down to a regular investment of a village which they had calculated would not delay their movements for more than a few days.

Fighting along western frontier north of Mafeking during October.

North of Mafeking the Boer forces had meanwhile been kept well occupied. On October 15th, Commandant P. D. Swart, with the "bushveld" contingent of the Marico burghers, seized Lobatsi. Reinforced by a detachment of Rustenburgers under Piet Kruger, the Boers, 300 to 400 strong, moved north towards Crocodile Pools, about sixty-five miles north of Mafeking, to meet the armoured train which patrolled the line from Buluwayo. They had not long to wait. On the 18th, the *Powerful* under Captain Llewellyn, with a total crew of forty-seven men and carrying a 7-pounder and a Maxim, came up to the Pools and repulsed them, inflicting some thirty casualties. On receipt of the news of this engagement Cronje at once decided to detach a further strong commando with guns under Snyman to meet this formidable attack from the north. But before Snyman arrived, the *Powerful* found time to engage Piet Kruger again near the Pools with equally successful results. On the 23rd, the train fell back before Snyman to Gaberones and subsequently to Mochudi, the "stad" of the powerful native chief Linchwe, and to Magalapye. On the 26th, Snyman occupied Gaberones. A few days later, having gradually realised the insignificance of the force opposed to him, he returned to Mafeking. After his departure, the Boers, on the 31st, wrecked a culvert north of Mochudi, and for a few days held the place till driven out by reinforcements under Colonel Holdsworth, aided by Linchwe's Kaffirs. Piet Kruger, who had made his headquarters at Deerdeport east of Gaberones, occupied his men with occasional skirmishes against the armoured train, and with the looting of Linchwe's cattle.

Operations on Limpopo in October.

On October 11th, the only force at Tuli consisted of 29 police with one 12½-pounder and one 7-pounder. But the Rhodesia Regiment was on its way, and by the 16th,

Colonel Plumer had four squadrons stationed on the Limpopo in the vicinity of Rhodes' Drift, and another in reserve at Tuli. For the next few days there were constant skirmishes between patrols and watering parties, in which the British, in spite of their numerical inferiority, held their own, and even patrolled some distance into the Transvaal. A more serious skirmish took place on the 21st, in which Captain Blackburn, commanding D squadron, was mortally wounded. This and other signs that the Boer force was being strengthened, induced Colonel Plumer to withdraw his men to Tuli the next day, sending one squadron right back to Macloutsie on the railway in case the Boers at Baines' Drift and Selika's should attempt to invade Rhodesia through Khama's country. As it happened the Boers fell back almost simultaneously. Field-cornet Briel had been so thoroughly alarmed by the activity of the Rhodesian troopers that he had sent urgent requests for reinforcement to Pretoria, in order to prevent an imminent invasion of the Transvaal from the north. A commando 250 strong, organised in Johannesburg by Sarel Eloff, President Kruger's grandson, accompanied by several guns under Freiherr von Dalwig,* was hurriedly sent up from Pretoria, and pending its arrival Briel remained inactive. Discovering this, Plumer moved two squadrons down to the Limpopo again on the 27th. The usual skirmishing followed, but it was not till November 2nd that the Boers, whose guns had now come up, ventured to attack in force. They crossed the river and captured a small convoy of wagons at Bryce's Store, near Rhodes' Drift, taking a dozen prisoners. A simultaneous attack by Commandant Du Preez and Field-cornet Kelly on the squadron at the Drift was less successful. Colonel Spreckley held his own against very heavy odds all day, and withdrew through the bush to Tuli after nightfall. For the rest of the month Plumer's men remained concentrated at Tuli, keeping in touch with the Boers by constant patrols.

South of Mafeking, the next place of any importance along the border was Vryburg. A small detachment of Cape Police under Assistant-Commissioner Scott was stationed

Disloyal Vryburg. Suicide of Major Scott. Vryburg occupied Oct. 18.

* A German officer in the Boer service who played a part of some importance in the Boer military councils before the outbreak of war.

here, and, combined with the local volunteer corps, might, perhaps, have attempted to make some sort of defence. But the population of the little town was Dutch, and in close touch with the commandos over the border, while the disloyal element was strengthened by the presence of a large number of farmers who had come in from the surrounding country to celebrate "Nachtmaal," or Holy Communion. The resident magistrate was weak and incapable, and could think of nothing better than to send imploring telegrams to Kimberley, asking that Vryburg should not be defended. On the afternoon of the 14th, De Beer's Bloemhof Commando destroyed the railway and telegraph at two points between Vryburg and Taungs, thus cutting off Vryburg from communication with the outer world. On the morning of the 15th, a number of the more influential citizens called a public meeting to demand the surrender of the town, and approached members of the Police and volunteers individually, urging them to refuse to fight if called upon. In spite of this attitude on the part of the inhabitants, and of the opposition of the magistrate, Major Scott paraded the men and, after addressing them, asked for volunteers for the defence of the town. Six men responded. Seeing that resistance was useless, Major Scott retired with his handful of police upon Geluk, and there, in the bitterness of his disillusionment at the disloyalty of men who had sworn to fight for the Queen, took his own life that same evening. His men made their way to Barkly West. It was not till the 18th that Vryburg was formally occupied by a force of some 1300 men under De la Rey, who had moved south from Mafeking. Amid the loud applause of the registered voters of a free British town, the Transvaal general now declared in theatrical words, reading almost like an echo of Lord Wolseley's famous declaration at Pretoria in 1879, that the Republican flag was flying over all the land north of the Orange River, and would continue to fly there for ever.

Line occupied along whole western

Meanwhile, on the 15th, the Bloemhof and Christiana burghers moving south, occupied Taungs and Fourteen Streams, from which the small detachments of Cape Police

made their way back to Barkly West. At Fourteen Streams the important railway bridge over the Vaal was partially destroyed. Here the Transvaalers were joined on the 17th by a small contingent of the Boshof Free Staters, whose main body, under Du Plessis, had destroyed the line between Windsorton and Riverton Station on the night of the 14th, and occupied Riverton Station on the morning of the 15th, chasing for some miles a small body of police whom Kekewich had sent out to bring in the dozen policemen at the Station. South of Kimberley, the Free Staters crossed the border on the evening of the 14th and broke up the railway and cut the telegraph wires near Spytfontein and Modder River. Kekewich had received instructions to send a detachment of infantry to guard the bridge, but had prudently put off taking a step which could only have resulted in the loss of part of his already insufficient force. After several unsuccessful attempts the railway bridge at Modder River was partially destroyed by the Boers some days afterwards. On the 19th, Van der Merwe, with 300 Fauresmith Burghers, occupied Belmont Station. Thus, at the end of a week of war, the whole of the railway from Orange River to Mafeking was in the hands of the Boers, with the exception of a few miles on either side of Kimberley itself. Everywhere the invaders met with the acquiescence, and even the active help, of the inhabitants. The subject of the rebellion in Cape Colony and of the action of the Republics in annexing British territory is one that is, perhaps, better treated separately. It is enough to say, for the present, that the proclamation issued by President Steyn on October 14, and amplified by proclamations from Wessels and other Transvaal and Free States commandants, while it did not formally declare the annexation of the occupied territories, was in practice treated as having done so, and wavering disloyalists were impelled to take up arms by being told that to do so was their obligation as Transvaal or Free State burghers. Towards those who were unwilling to take up arms for the cause of a United Dutch South Africa, or who might even be tempted by their loyalty to help the British troops, the Republican commandants were prepared to show no mistaken leniency. Though their own forces consisted of

border. Boer attitude in occupied territory. Their proclamations.

irregulars wearing no uniform * and subject to very little discipline, and though they were themselves inciting the civilian inhabitants of British territories to take up arms in order to attack and hamper the regular forces of their own lawful sovereign, they had no mind to concede any such privileges to the other side. There can be no doubt that the attitude they took up had a useful effect in safeguarding their communications in British territory from the operations of enterprising loyalists. To quote the wording of the most important paragraph which appears in all these proclamations, whether issued in Cape Colony or Natal :—

"All persons who do not constitute a portion of the British Army, and who (*a*) serve the enemy as spies; (*b*) cause the burghers and men of the South African Republic and Orange Free State to lose their way when acting as guides; (*c*) kill, murder, or rob persons belonging to one of the Republics, or

* It is to be regretted that the British Government did not at the outset declare that it would refuse to treat the ununiformed commandos of the Boers as belligerents on British soil. The right of a population to take up arms to repel invasion of its own territory is one that the British representatives strongly urged at The Hague Conference. But the invasion and occupation of another country by bands of armed men in ordinary clothes, indistinguishable from the civilian population of the country, for whom they would frequently pass themselves off for purposes of espionage, was a very different matter. A declaration that all armed men made prisoners on British territory, and not wearing some permanent and easily recognisable uniform or badge marking them as belonging to the Republican forces, would be treated as bandits and be liable to be shot without ceremony, would have had an excellent effect and might have delayed or possibly even have altogether prevented an invasion, while it would have been in perfect harmony with The Hague Convention on the Laws and Customs of War (articles 1 and 2). That no steps at all were taken, and that in consequence British generals had to fight at a most serious disadvantage, is simply another instance of the casual and haphazard fashion in which the war was taken in hand by those in supreme authority. The British Government was not, strictly speaking, bound to observe the rules of The Hague Convention towards the Boers. But if it had announced its intention of both observing and enforcing those rules strictly, it would not only have gained European sympathy but would have derived substantial advantages, and might even have averted or kept within limits the long guerilla campaign, with all its regrettable concomitants, which followed the break up of the Boer armies. In war severity, if based on clearly defined rules, is often far more humane in the end than mere easy-going contempt of one's enemy masquerading as clemency.

forming part of their following and train ; (*d*) destroy bridges or damage telegraph lines, heliographic apparatus, or railways, or in any way cause damage to parts or portions of the same, whereby the Republics may be hindered or their people or property damaged, or even they who in any way endeavour to repair or make good the damage done by the Republican forces to property or apparatus, or who set fire to the ammunition, war supplies, quarters or camps of the Republican forces, or in any way damage them ; (*e*) take up arms against the forces of one of the said Republics shall, at the discretion of a Council of War, be punished with death or imprisonment not exceeding fifteen years."

Operations round Kimberley up to Nov. 4.

In Kimberley itself Colonel Kekewich was not inactive, considering the smallness of the force at his disposal for offensive operations. His first anxiety was to call in all the outlying detachments of the Cape Police, for though much too weak separately to hold any of their posts they would when added together make an appreciable addition to the mounted forces under his command. In spite of the entreaties of the Resident Magistrate of Barkly West who hoped to defend his township, this concentration was effected by the 23rd when the Vryburg Police safely reached Kimberley.* The only exception was a body of thirty-five policemen under Inspector Bates who remained at the mission station of Kuruman, seventy-five miles south-west of Vryburg. A quantity of rifles and ammunition was also brought in from Barkly West on the 20th. On the 15th Kekewich declared a state of siege and, foreseeing the possibility of such a siege being prolonged, took over all the supplies in private stores. That same morning an armoured train was sent south to Spytfontein and after a short engagement fell back when the Boers began to bring their artillery into play. During the next few days reconnaissances were made with the trains and with mounted troops, but the Boers, who were waiting to concentrate their forces, showed no hurry to move on the town. On the 20th, Kekewich, being informed of the

* A further little party of eighteen men, led by Inspector Berange, only arrived in Kimberley on November 2, having marched over 250 miles from Upington near the borders of the German territory. Berange, who acted on his own initiative, deserves some credit for recognising the necessity of a concentration of all available forces.

proclamations issued by De la Rey and other leaders of the invading forces, issued a counter proclamation declaring any proclamation of annexation to be null and void and warning rebels of the consequences of their acts. On the morning of the 24th, Major Scott Turner, with 300 mounted troops, went out on a reconnaissance to Macfarlane Siding about thirteen miles north of Kimberley. Finding the Boers (Boshof Commando) in force, he signalled back to Kekewich stationed on his conning tower improvised from the headgear of a mine. Kekewich at once sent out the North Lancashires, two guns, and another 100 mounted men. A most successful action followed in which the Boers were driven off the ridges east of Dronfield and Macfarlane's with some loss, including that of Field-Cornet Botha, whose body was left on the field. So effective was this vigorous little stroke that the Boshof Boers fell back altogether from the line north of Kimberley, and that side of the town remained open till the arrival of De la Rey's force on the 29th. Meanwhile small skirmishes and reconnaissances went on south and east of the town. On the 27th, President Steyn, dissatisfied, perhaps, with the dilatory tactics of his burghers, arrived in Jacobsdal and addressed them in a vigorous harangue. But it was not till the first days of November that the Boers really closed in on Kimberley. On November 1st, De la Rey's men reoccupied Dronfield and blew up the large dynamite stores belonging to the De Beer's Company. On the 3rd, skirmishing was going on all round Kimberley. On the 4th, Chief Commandant Wessels sent in a formal demand for the surrender of the town. This was refused, and from this date the siege of Kimberley may be said to begin.

The southern border. Steyn and Basutos. Steyn decides to cross Orange River.

Along the Southern border of the Orange Free State the first three weeks of war were passed in almost complete inactivity. For the little British garrisons dumped down at some desolate railway junction on the waste veld of the northern Karroo it was a time of weary and uninteresting labour and of profound discomfort. A third of the men were on picket duty nightly, and practically the whole of the garrisons were busy on fatigue work during the day. Incessant dust-storms sweeping without warning through the

camps, and blotting out sunshine, tents, sentries, everything, in a brown tingling wave of all-permeating grit, intensified the squalor and discomfort. Lasting sometimes for hours these dust-storms would have given a good opportunity for an enterprising enemy to rush the camps—if there had been any enemy near. But as yet the Free Staters showed no signs of beginning the invasion. A large part of the commandos which were soon to come down to the Orange River were still on the Basuto border anxious as to the attitude of their formidable neighbours. On October 18th, President Steyn issued a proclamation to the chiefs and nation of the Basutos declaring that the Free State had no quarrel with them, and would do no harm to them if they kept quiet and took no part in assisting the English. Privately, however, a good deal of intriguing went on across the border in the hope of securing the active help of some of the chiefs, or at least of provoking internal disturbances in Basutoland and making Sir G. Lagden's position impossible. On the 25th a large Pitso or assembly of chiefs from all parts of Basutoland was addressed at the Putiatsana River by Sir G. Lagden who explained the situation to them and urged them to remember that this was a white man's war, in which the Basutos were to take no part, except to defend their borders if attacked. Towards the end of the month several of the Free State contingents along the Basuto border moved down to the Orange River. Here the policy of bluff was working well, owing to a variety of circumstances, not least of which was Steyn's reluctance to invade Cape Colony south of the river in defiance of his pledges—a difficulty he had hoped to see overcome by a spontaneous rising on the part of the colonists. But the attitude of the colonists was one of some hesitation. Many of the younger and more hot-headed men had already crossed the river to join the commandos. The High Commissioner's proclamation of the 12th, bearing Mr. Schreiner's signature, and warning all British subjects against any disloyal action and reminding them of the penalties to which they were liable, no doubt had its effect on responsible men and owners of property. The calling out of the greater part of the colonial volunteer

corps on the 16th for service at the sea bases and along the lines of communication, as well as the exaggerated accounts of British successes in Natal furnished to the press by uncritical correspondents, helped to give weight to these warnings. Nevertheless the border districts were in a state of suppressed ferment. The trial of Mr. Rothman, a prominent Dutch resident of Colesberg, for seditious language, gave the inhabitants of that town an opportunity for displaying their disloyal sentiments. In spite of the presence of a small guard of Cape Police at each of the bridges over the Orange River, the leaders of the rebel faction were in daily communication with the Free State Commandants, informing them of the absence of any British forces nearer than the railway junctions and urging them to invade the Colony and give just that physical and moral support which the forces of rebellion still lacked. When Steyn returned to Bloemfontein he found Grobler and the other commandants busily petitioning to be allowed to cross the river and help their "oppressed Afrikander brethren." The commandos on the border were growing stronger daily. The Transvaal contingent under General Hendrik Schoeman reached Donkerpoort near Norval's Pont on the 31st. A battery of artillery from Pretoria followed a day or two after. To crown all came the news of Joubert's great victory over White on the 30th and the confident expectation that a few days more would see the surrender of the main body of the British troops in South Africa. To hesitate at such a time would be to stand in the way of the manifest destiny of the Afrikander nation. And so abandoning his scruples and forgetful of the pledges in return for which he had during the past months enjoyed the moral, and even in a sense the material support of the Cape Ministry, President Steyn gave the word for his commandos to cross the Orange River.*

* It must be remembered that crossing the Orange River was in Afrikander, if not in English eyes, a far more significant act than the invasion of Bechuanaland or Griqualand. The latter act only implied an attempt to reverse the extensions of territory made by Great Britain at the expense of the Republics during the last generation. The former emphasised the deliberate intention to drive the British power from every part of the South African continent.

Oct. 31. Sir R. Buller lands at Cape Town.

On the morning of October 31, the *Dunottar Castle*, with Sir Redvers Buller on board, moored alongside the quay in Table Bay. The streets of Cape Town were gay with flags, and as the Commander-in-Chief drove up to Government House he was greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm by the dense crowds that had been waiting for many hours to see him pass. The loyal population, oppressed by rumours, as yet vague, of unsuccess in Natal and of invasion and rebellion in Cape Colony, the crowds of Uitlander refugees anxiously reckoning if their small savings would enable them to hold out till the war was over, alike felt a load of care lifted from their hearts as they watched the general's calm, impassive face. No troops had come with him, but the sight of that quiet, stolid Englishman personified to them the whole might of the British Empire and of that great Army Corps, the embodiment of irresistible force and of the perfection of modern military science, which was to crush the misguided ambitions of a plotting faction and lay for ever the spirit of unrest that for so long had vexed the peace and hampered the progress of South Africa. They were soon to learn that neither the Army Corps nor the distinguished general whom they now welcomed was equal to the greatness of a task which was yet to call for the whole visible and latent military power of the Empire.

Difficulty of Buller's situation.

It was in truth an anxious situation that Sir Redvers Buller found awaiting him. Between his triumphant departure from England and his landing at Cape Town everything had changed. The news of victories signalled by passing steamers had raised hopes which only cast into stronger relief the unpleasant reality that now confronted him. In Natal, Sir G. White, on whom he had relied to play the Boers for at least another month, had, as it seemed, recklessly staked all on a decisive battle on the very day his superior was expected to arrive, and had lost. The full measure of his defeat was not yet known to Sir Redvers Buller, but it was evident that the Ladysmith force was seriously weakened and would require to be strongly reinforced if it was to hold its own and protect Natal from further invasion. In Cape Colony, Mafeking and Kimberley were cut off, while the Free

Staters were threatening to cross the Orange River at half a dozen points. How serious the result of that invasion might be was realised by Sir Redvers Buller when he saw at Government House a map of the districts which were ready to rise in rebellion the moment an opportunity offered itself. He is said to have remarked that he was expected to conquer, not the two Republics, but the whole of South Africa.

Nov. 1–3. Free Staters cross Orange River. Buller evacuates Naauwpoort and Stormberg.

During the next few days the situation in Cape Colony rapidly changed for the worse. On November 1st the Free Staters seized the important railway bridge over the Orange River at Norval's Pont, making prisoners of the six policemen who guarded it. On the same day, Swanepoel and Du Plooy, with the Smithfield and Bethulie commandos, some 900 men with two guns, crossed the Bethulie bridges.* The safety of the garrisons at Naauwpoort and Stormberg at once became a question for earnest consideration. They could not be reinforced, for the only battalion which had arrived during the last few days, the 1st Border Regiment, had been brought down to East London again and sent on to Natal. If the Free Staters marched on them suddenly while the Colony rose in their rear they might be cut off, and there would be two more reliefs to carry out besides those of Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking. Recollecting, perhaps, how the urgent necessity of relieving the besieged garrisons in the Transvaal had been Colley's undoing in 1881, General Buller not unnaturally looked forward with reluctance to such a prospect. So, on November 3, he suddenly† decided to withdraw from both Naauwpoort and Stormberg for the present, and telegraphed to the garrisons to fall back without delay on

* The Orange River was in flood at this moment, and the blowing up of all the bridges would have averted the invasion for several days at least. But it may be urged on behalf of General Forestier-Walker and Sir R. Buller that these bridges were intended to play so important a part in the advance of the Army Corps, that it was worth while running the risk of letting the Boers use them in the meanwhile.

† So hurried in fact was the decision that it was taken without waiting to consult Major F. C. Heath, R.E., who had just returned from an inspection of the fortifications at Stormberg, but could not be found at the moment. It is said that he was having his hair cut at the time, and when he returned from the barber's found to his surprise that the question had been settled, and the orders sent.

De Aar and Queenstown respectively. It was an unfortunate decision, especially as regards Stormberg. The policy of bluff which had hitherto worked so successfully was abandoned at the very moment when it might be of greatest service, and when another week would see the arrival of the first troops from England. One cannot help feeling that the better course would have been to have instructed the officers commanding the garrisons to wait and keep demonstrating till the last moment but not to let themselves be invested.* Even if they had been invested, they were on the main line of Sir R. Buller's intended advance, and their relief need not have interfered seriously with his plan of operations. It has been said that Sir A. Milner's extreme pessimism with regard to the possibility of rebellion had a discouraging influence on General Buller. No doubt the High Commissioner was inclined to a pessimistic view, and rightly so. But he also knew exactly how far he could go with these people, whose sentiments and character he understood so well, and was strongly opposed to a withdrawal which he knew could only encourage the disaffected. Still Sir Redvers Buller's responsibility was a heavy one, and the prospect of the surrender of one of the garrisons or of disaster to a little infantry force trying to retreat through a disaffected country in the hands of a mobile enemy, was not a pleasant one. Here, as throughout the war, the helplessness of foot soldiers in a country like South Africa lay at the bottom of much of the apparent irresolution and timidity of British strategy.

Defenceless state of Natal obliges Buller to divert part of Army Corps.

Natal presented a still more serious problem. On November 3, Sir R. Buller learnt that the little garrison at Colenso had fallen back on Estcourt. It was now becoming clear that Ladysmith was not simply cut off but about to be closely invested, and that Sir G. White would require not merely to be reinforced but to be relieved—a very different operation. More than that, the whole of Natal was now at the mercy of the invaders. If only Sir G. White had sent

* It might, however, have been advisable to withdraw the greater part of the vast quantities of stores being accumulated at these points for the advance of the Army Corps. These could not very well have been removed in face of the enemy.

out his splendid cavalry they might, with the help of local levies, have delayed the enemy till the main army was ready to invade the Free State. As it was, troops for the defence of Natal had to be sought elsewhere; in other words, the Army Corps had to be broken up. For the moment even that step was impossible. All that could be done was to send round Captain Scott and the *Terrible* to Durban to organise the land defences of that harbour—so that even if all Natal were overrun the British Army might at least have a sea base from which to start the task of reconquest. The whole plan of campaign had been based on the fixed assumption that Sir G. White could hold his own in Natal for two or three months at least. Meanwhile the Army Corps, each division landing at its own port, should gradually concentrate up country, and when every arrangement had been made perfect, cross the Orange River and begin its march on Pretoria in the early days of December. All this imposing framework of theory was fast crumbling away before the unpleasant advance of the Boers into British territory. There was no question now of orderly preparation to be completed with business-like punctuality in the early days of December, but of improvising at once a line of defence somehow, anyhow, with whatever material came first to hand. Cavalry and mounted infantry and then artillery were wanted most, but for the next fortnight hardly anything but infantry was available, for the great Army Corps scheme had taken no account of pressing necessities, and its constituent parts had been sent off, not in the order of their greatest utility on arrival—though, indeed, neither Sir R. Buller nor the War Office had yet realised the helplessness of infantry in South Africa—but in order of convenience of embarkation.

But diversion intended to be temporary. Inadequacy of Army Corps not yet recognised.

At the same time, neither Sir Redvers Buller, nor anyone else, imagined then that the Army Corps was being broken up for good and all. The diverting of its parts to Natal and elsewhere might indeed delay the advance on Bloemfontein, but the intention still remained the same; as soon as the temporary difficulties were got over, these parts would be brought back to their proper point of concentration, and the triumphal march would begin. The delay would afford time

for the mobilisation and arrival of an additional division in case it was found inconvenient to bring back the troops that were now being sent to Natal. The announcement that a Fifth Division was to mobilize was in fact made on November 11, as soon as the War Office found that Buller was forced to send a division to Natal. Speaking with the wisdom of subsequent experience, one may say that the right course for Sir R. Buller to pursue would have been to have telegraphed at once for another Army Corps. But it must be remembered in the first place that to take such a step before a single battalion of the First Army Corps had landed or come in contact with the enemy would have required marvellous boldness on the part of a British general who knew the War Office so well as did Sir R. Buller. Nor had Sir R. Buller at Cape Town much better opportunity for judging the lessons of the Natal battlefields, a thousand miles away, than the authorities at home. And at home, though the *Times*, indeed, suggested the mobilizing of two extra divisions as early as November 6, the magnitude of the task that lay before the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa was as yet very far from being understood. It is easy to say now that 15,000 British troops, trained and organised as British troops were in 1899, were an adequate force with which to meet 20,000 Boers, even before the latter had acquired the skill and the spirit they showed later, and to allow that Sir G. White did as well as might be expected from the average officer who, under the British Army system, rose to high command. But to Sir R. Buller then it must have seemed that the chief cause of failure was the incapacity of the general in command in Natal, and it was not so unnatural as it now appears to hope that if one of his lieutenants could "dig out" White from his earth in Ladysmith and arrange a new scheme of defence on the Tugela or elsewhere, the original plan might yet succeed.

Hildyard's and Barton's brigades diverted. Methuen to relieve Kimberley.

The actual emergency measures which Sir R. Buller decided on during the next ten days were as follows. The first troops expected were the Second Infantry Brigade, under Hildyard. This formed part of the First Division under Lord Methuen, and was to have landed at Cape Town. It

was now sent on to Natal as fast as its transports arrived (November 9–15). It was followed a few days later by one of Gatacre's Brigades, the Sixth, under Barton, and by the artillery of the First Division. This force, added to the small force at Estcourt and the local volunteers which were being raised in Natal, was to protect the Colony from invasion by the overflow of the Boers from Ladysmith, and was then to advance and join hands with White. Meanwhile, on the Western Border, Lord Methuen was to advance rapidly on Kimberley with a division composed of one of his own brigades, the Guards, the line of communication battalions and such other troops as were already at De Aar and Orange River, scattering the comparatively weak Boer forces between him and Kekewich. After relieving Kimberley, Methuen could keep the Boers on that side employed till things were ready for the march to Bloemfontein, when he might co-operate either from Kimberley or along the north bank of the Orange River. While Methuen relieved Kimberley, Clery, with the Second Division, Gatacre with his remaining brigade and such miscellaneous troops as he found to hand, and French, with the greater part of the cavalry division, were to repel any advance along the whole front from Orange River Station to Aliwal North and prepare for the moment when, the Natal difficulty being settled, the original plan of campaign would be resumed.

Further breaking up of Army Corps. Buller himself goes off to Natal. Nov. 22.

But the breaking up of the Army Corps was not destined to stop at this point. By November 15, the Boers, whose numbers were greatly exaggerated by the officers commanding in Natal, were threatening an envelopment of Estcourt, and on that day signalised their nearness and activity by the capture of an armoured train. In view of the anxiety of his own lieutenants and of the Natal Government, Buller saw no alternative but to divert still more troops to Natal. General Clery, commanding the Second Division, was now sent off to take over the command, and arrived at Durban on the 19th. He was to be followed by one of his brigades (Lyttelton's), which was due to disembark at Port Elizabeth for Naauwpoort in the next few days. Something like 14,000 men were now collecting in Natal south of the Tugela. But

the situation only seemed to grow worse. On the 22nd, Hildyard at Estcourt was completely cut off by a Boer force reported to be some 7000 strong, while another force was bombarding Barton at Mooi River twenty miles away, and a third creating alarms at Nottingham Road, still nearer Maritzburg. There appeared to be no attempt at co-operation between the British forces, which were strung out like beads on a chain, no direction, only a general terror and paralysis. The situation proved too much for Sir Redvers Buller's patience. He decided that same day to go and see for himself. He would put a new spirit into the troops, relieve Ladysmith, reorganise the defence of Natal on a proper footing, and then return—a fortnight or three weeks would suffice for the task. In accordance with his wont, he neither took counsel nor informed others of his intention. Taking only his military secretary, Colonel Stopford, and a few aides-de-camp, and leaving the rest of his staff to look after themselves and continue their preparations for the advance on Bloemfontein, he suddenly vanished from Cape Town, to reappear at Durban three days later. His going involved a still further diversion of troops to Natal: the Somerset Light Infantry (one of the line of communication battalions), the Corps Cavalry (13th Hussars) and a regiment from French's Second Cavalry Brigade (1st Dragoons), the artillery of the Second Division, and lastly, the remaining brigade (Hart's) of the Third Division, except the Royal Irish Rifles who had already got up to Queenstown with Gatacre, and were all that remained to that unfortunate general of the fine force he had been selected to command. Thus, by the date at which the Army Corps had once been intended to cross the Orange River in the perfection of its numbers and organisation, practically half of it * had been sucked up in the vortex of the Natal complication, and the *disjecta membra*, divisional generals without divisions, solitary brigades of infantry or cavalry, stray batteries and

* Sixteen battalions of Infantry out of thirty-three, eight batteries of Field Artillery out of fifteen (or nineteen, if the Horse Artillery batteries are included), and two out of seven cavalry regiments (or two and a half out of nine, if the Mounted Infantry are included).

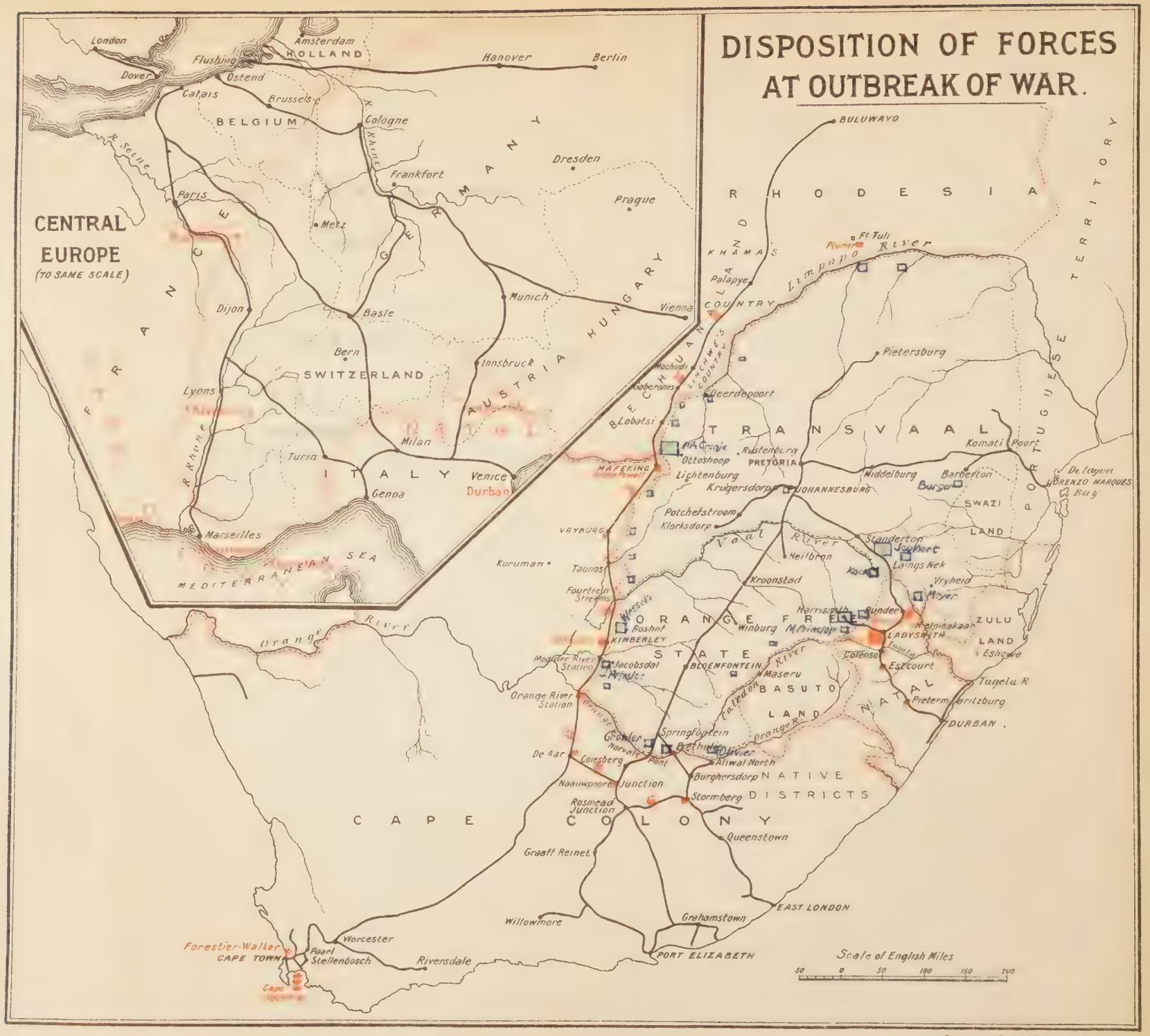
battalions, were scattered about the frontiers of Cape Colony to carry on as best they might till the occasion might come for bringing all into their place again.

Discussion of Buller's policy.

Sir Redvers Buller has been severely criticised for allowing the situation in Natal and at Kimberley to wreck the whole plan of campaign. But it is difficult to see what other course he could have pursued. At the time when the first transports were sent on to Durban, there was really no question of relieving Natal by an immediate advance on Bloemfontein. In the first place the army would not have been ready to cross the Orange River for nearly a month. Before that the Boers might have captured Maritzburg, and over-run the whole of Natal, and Ladysmith might have fallen. From a military point of view alone, such a result would have been a terrible disaster. From the political standpoint it was unthinkable. Not only British prestige, but the Imperial obligation which bade Sir Alfred Milner assure Natal that the colony would be defended by the whole might of the Empire, completely put out of the question the abandonment—necessarily prolonged—of a loyal and prosperous colony to a host of marauding invaders. And even if the Army Corps had been ready to march on Bloemfontein at once, it is by no means certain that the Boers would have relaxed their grip on Natal. They knew well enough that Ladysmith and Maritzburg were worth more to them than Bloemfontein. The effect at a later date of Lord Roberts' march to Paardeberg upon the Boer resistance at the Tugela has usually been over-estimated, while Pretoria itself was in British hands some days before the Boers were finally driven out of Natal. Whether Sir Redvers Buller would not have been better advised to have remained at Cape Town himself to exercise a general direction, is another matter. Natal was for the time being the most important part of the war, and what seemed to be lacking there was not so much troops as that vigorous personal direction which no telegrams from Cape Town could supply. It was a strong and justifiable impulse that sent Sir R. Buller to Natal to set things right. But his departure left no one in direct command in Cape Colony. Once in Natal, and

DISPOSITION OF FORCES AT OUTBREAK OF WAR.

DIRECTIONS.
- British
- Boers
- Armoured Trains



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conducting operations in the field, Sir R. Buller almost inevitably lost that general perspective so essential to one who was commanding-in-chief over an area half as large as Europe. The fact is that each area of war really required a supreme commander, capable of acting on his own initiative. In Natal this part had originally been allotted to Sir G. White. But by submitting to investment White had resigned it, and left Buller the task of finding a substitute. Sir Evelyn Wood at home fully realized the position when he telegraphed to Buller just before the latter decided to start for Durban, offering to serve under him in Natal, an offer which Buller declined. A somewhat different criticism is that Sir R. Buller should from the first have transferred nearly the whole of the Army Corps to Natal, leaving Sir F. Forestier-Walker, with Sir A. Milner's help, to continue organising such defence as he could manage with a few battalions and locally raised volunteers, pending the arrival of the Fifth Division from home. This might have meant sacrificing Kimberley, but it might also have have brought about a decisive victory in Natal over the main Boer Army, and if things really went well, an advance on Pretoria through Lang's Nek before the end of the year. It would have been a bold policy, but it certainly would have been sounder than the suggested policy of neglecting Natal and pushing on to Bloemfontein, and might have been crowned by a great success. As regards the wisdom of detailing Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley, the step was at the time a very natural one, and there is no ground for assuming that Sir R. Buller allowed himself to be unduly influenced by political pressure.* The troops left in Cape Colony were together inadequate in numbers and equipment to the task of advancing on Bloemfontein, whereas it was not considered beyond Methuen's power to traverse the seventy miles of open country to Kimberley, with a railway on his line of march, no great natural obstacles to cross, and a weak force of the

* It is true that the civilian inhabitants, including Mr. Rhodes, were already somewhat clamorous for relief, but the information Sir R. Buller received from Kekewich made it clear that the situation was in no sense critical.

enemy in front. For it must not be forgotten that when the relief of Kimberley was decided on Cronje was still at Mafeking, which place he had only left a few hours when Methuen started on his march.

Staff work at Cape Town. The things which succeeded.

During the three weeks spent at Cape Town, Sir Redvers Buller and his staff were busy with the task of organisation. Much of the work was doomed to be wasted owing to the complete shipwreck of the plans it was meant to further; much of it was inadequate to the subsequent magnitude of the war. But it was good work, nevertheless. The redistribution of the Army Corps, the sending of troops to the front in Natal, and the despatch of Methuen's column, were in themselves considerable tasks. The troops were disembarked and entrained for the front with admirable despatch. The supply, transport, and railway departments proved themselves fully adequate to the task they were called upon to undertake, and at a later date managed to cope with remarkable success with the enormously increased burden thrust upon them. Failure in these departments would have been far more serious, and entailed far worse consequences than the military failures which, unwelcome as they were, were after all checks rather than irreparable disasters. The history of the South African war, as of all wars, is largely a history of blunders. The blunders committed by us were grave enough, and their consequence is seen in the dragging out into a third year of a war which might not have lasted three months if skilfully handled. But there were far graver blunders which were not committed. It is difficult to imagine what the state of affairs might have been if the war had been managed on the same lines as the Crimean War, as the French expedition to Madagascar, or even the American expedition to Cuba. In fact for every purpose, save one, the Army Corps had been perfectly organised. It was in every respect capable of achieving a successful march to Pretoria—if only it had been a match for the Boers in the field. The arrival of the Army Corps itself, the great fleet of splendid transports gathering together in Table Bay, the swift mysterious passage of the troops straight from the harbour to some unknown destination beyond De Aar, were striking and

impressive facts. They created among the loyal colonists a profound sense of confidence in the power of the great military engine which was to crush Boer arrogance, and did much during these critical months to keep the disloyal element in passive loyalty.

The need of mounted men, especially colonials. Failure of military to recognise their value.

At the front, indeed, things looked less well. The imposing infantry battalions which were to form the great mass of the "steam-roller" were but small, helpless bodies when dumped down in twos and threes on the vast spaces of the open veld. For the immediate purpose, in Cape Colony as in Natal, a few thousand mounted men with a reasonable allowance of artillery would have been worth far more than the thirty-three infantry battalions of the Army Corps. Of such mounted men it might have been possible, then as afterwards, to raise large numbers in South Africa itself. But the principle enunciated by General Gordon at the time of the first Transvaal war as applying to South African warfare: "regulars should only act as a reserve, the real fighting should be done by special irregular corps, commanded by special men who would be untrammelled by regulations," was not recognised by the military authorities at home or in South Africa. It is true that Sir G. White had, as early as October 16, authorised the formation in Natal of two more mounted corps—Thorneycroft's and Bethune's mounted infantry—on the model of the Imperial Light Horse. Within a few days of his arrival, Sir R. Buller had given his sanction to the raising in Cape Colony of Colonel Brabant's Horse (1st Brabant's), and the South African Light Horse, the former composed chiefly of Eastern Province farmers, and the latter of Uitlanders recruited at the seaports, and in Natal, of the Imperial Light Infantry composed chiefly of Uitlanders. After his arrival in Natal he also authorised the formation of a very useful corps of Colonial Scouts. All these forces were destined to do excellent work. But the old spirit of self-sufficiency, and the lack of the courage to take whole measures were still too deeply ingrained. Instead of enlisting every available man, and doing everything to urge and stimulate co-operation from the colonials, the military authorities would only consent at first to sanction

these corps almost as a favour, and would insist on their numbers being strictly limited.* Nor was there any notion of letting these men fight by themselves and according to their own methods. They were to be mounted infantry bound fast to infantry forces or nothing at all. In the face of this attitude it is not surprising that the large loyalist population of South Africa did so much less at this period than it might have done, or than it subsequently did do, or that it tended to acquiesce in the military view that this war was the regular army's war. If there is one thing that the South African War should have taught the British Army, it is not to despise the value of local knowledge and experience, or of unprofessional assistance.

Events at Orange River. Belmont reconnaissance. Nov. 9–10.

Events at the front in Cape Colony, during the greater part of November, present no very dramatic features. On November 4, General Wood, R.E., arrived at De Aar, and took over the command of the section De Aar to Orange River. Defences were still further strengthened, and reconnaissances were made with the few mounted men available. A somewhat more ambitious reconnaissance from Orange River, undertaken by Colonel Gough, of the 9th Lancers, on November 9, was unfortunate in its results, though it served to show some of the dangers and difficulties of reconnaissance under modern conditions. Colonel Gough took out two squadrons of his regiment, about a company and a half of mounted infantry of the Northumberland Fusiliers and North Lancashires, and a battery of Field Artillery. On the morning of the 10th they found the Boers, some 350 strong under Commandant Van der Merwe, posted on some kopjes to the east of those over and round which the battle of the 23rd was subsequently fought. While the guns and the dismounted cavalry held the enemy with long range fire in front, the mounted infantry were sent to work round the Boer flank in order to discover the position of their laager. While doing so they suddenly came under close range rifle-fire

* No doubt the difference between the current South African rate of pay for troops (5*s.*), and the ordinary pay of the regular troops, was also partly responsible for this attitude.

from a small party which the Boers had sent out to protect their flank. In a moment the Northumberlands had lost all their officers, Lieut.-Colonel Keith-Falconer being killed, and Lieutenants Bevan and Hall wounded. Lieutenant Wood of the North Lancashires was mortally wounded. These were practically the only casualties, only two men being slightly wounded. The serious consequences of having all the officers picked off at the beginning of an engagement were made very manifest by this skirmish, which led directly to that general abandoning of all unnecessarily distinctive marks of rank, including the useless sword of the infantry officer, which has been one of the features of the war. Colonel Gough then withdrew his little force to Orange River. On the 12th, Lord Methuen arrived and took over the command, and for the next week preparations for the advance on Kimberley were busily made, as one battalion after another came up to complete the force.

Slow advance of Free Staters into Cape Colony. Olivier enters Aliwal, Nov. 13.

Further east, meanwhile, the invasion of Cape Colony was proceeding in a leisurely fashion. That the Free Staters made no attempt to take advantage of the great opportunities offered them by the evacuation of Naauwpoort and Stormberg was due, not so much to lack of information, as to the hesitation and indolence of their commandants. On the 5th and 6th of November, Grobler's and Schoeman's forces advanced slowly from Norval's Pont, and wrecked the railway bridges at Van Zyl and Achtertang within twelve miles of Colesberg Junction. At the same moment the British, afraid of a sudden rush by the Boers on Naauwpoort, were engaged in blowing up a culvert south of Arundel. On the 6th, the British in an armoured train similarly blew up a bridge ten miles south of Burghersdorp as a precaution against a quick advance of the Bethulie burghers, who, however, contented themselves during these days in skirmishing round the countryside, within twenty or thirty miles of the bridge, in the direction of Venterstad and Knapdaar. At Aliwal North a party of Boers crossed by the Sand Drift a dozen miles below the village on the 5th, broke up the railway, and made prisoners of a few policemen. The twenty Cape Police who had hitherto been guarding the bridge

over the Orange River now retired to Jamestown. But no immediate invasion followed. The disloyal majority of the inhabitants were continually sending invitations and promises of help across to Commandant Olivier, and on the 6th a formal meeting took place between Olivier and the leading disloyalists, including Mr. Smuts, the mayor of the town, on the middle of the bridge. But it was not till the morning of the 13th that Olivier, with 450 men and one gun, rode into Aliwal. Before crossing, the Boers sent a messenger over to fetch Mr. Hugo, the magistrate, and ordered him to stand on the middle of the bridge with his assistant and chief constable, while the commando crossed, as a precaution in case the bridge might be mined. Their anxiety was natural enough, for the destruction of Aliwal bridge, which was not likely to be required for the main advance upon Bloemfontein, was an obvious measure for the British to adopt. But as in Natal the British had not yet learned to take war seriously. The Boers then rode into the village, the Free State banner triumphantly borne in front, amid shouts of welcome from the inhabitants and from neighbouring farmers who had flocked into the town by prearrangement to witness the great occasion. The daughters of a former member of the Cape Parliament led the singing of the Volkslied. Olivier, a magnificent long-bearded specimen of Boer manhood, was almost smothered in the flowers which the ladies of the district had brought to pin on his breast.

Nov. 14. Boers enter Colesberg. Nov. 19. British reoccupy Naauwpoort.

On the 14th, Grobler and Schoeman, with some 700 men, entered Colesberg amid scenes of similar enthusiasm. A committee of prominent disloyalists was at once formed to help the Boer forces in the administration and the raising of recruits, and foremost among them was Mr. Ignatius van der Walt, one of the most respected senior members of the Cape Legislature. After the entry into Colesberg the Boers showed themselves as sluggish as before. Naauwpoort Junction was only 35 miles away, but, though they advanced as far as Arundel, they were only just thinking of moving on to Naauwpoort when that important point was reoccupied on the 19th by General Wauchope, who had succeeded General Wood in command at De Aar, with the half battalion of

Berkshires that had been there before the evacuation, half the 2nd battalion of the Black Watch, 70 New South Wales Lancers, and two 9-pounder muzzle-loaders. Leaving these at Naauwpoort, and some mounted infantry to guard the bridge over the Seacow River at Hanover Road, Wauchope returned to De Aar. On the 20th, General French arrived to take over the command at Naauwpoort. As soon as the first instalments of his mounted troops began to arrive, French took the initiative, sending out his patrols in every direction, from Hanover Road to Arundel and from Arundel to Rosmead Junction—the beginning of those skilful operations which for nearly three months were to cover the all-important railway communication between Cape Town and the front, to to confine the spread of rebellion and drain away an ever increasing number of Boers from other parts to the defence of Colesberg.

Nov. 15. Boers enter Burghersdorp.

On the 15th, the advanced body of the Bethulie burghers, under Commandant Du Plooy, entered Burghersdorp. "Rebel" Burghersdorp, the very centre and headquarters of "upright Afrikanderdom," received the invaders with no less enthusiasm than Aliwal or Colesberg. For weeks and months past the clergymen of the Dutch Reformed Church had been preaching rebellion from its pulpits.* Few things could better typify the influence of the Dutch clergy in fostering disloyalty than the following laconic message sent from Burghersdorp after the occupation: "The theological seminary is closed, most of the students having joined the enemy." At Burghersdorp, as at Colesberg and Aliwal, the commandeering of the Dutch farmers to fight as Free State burghers was begun at once, and everywhere the younger men flocked freely to the commandos. The loyalists could remain on their farms if they gave an oath of neutrality, or else had to leave the district at short notice with their families. Large numbers of them reached Queenstown in a

* It is worth noting, however, that some of the most prominent members of the extreme Afrikander Party, such as Professor Lion Cachet, were not altogether satisfied with what was happening, especially in regard to commandeering, and in deference to their wishes, Du Plooy, with his commando, moved out of Burghersdorp the next day, and remained camped outside of the village.

destitute condition about the same time as Gatacre's troops began to arrive from the south. The hospitable and charitable reception they met with from the townsfolk did something, if not much, to compensate for months of exile from their homes and for the loss of their property or their occupation.

Olivier at Jamestown, Lady Grey, Barkly. Boers occupy Stormberg, Nov. 26.

A day or two later Olivier came down from Aliwal to Burghersdorp, and on the morning of the 18th rode into Jamestown with fifty men, hoisted the Republican colours, appointed Free State magistrates, and rode back in a hurry to Aliwal to catch up part of his commando which was going on a tour of annexation towards Barkly East. The Boers had first marched for Herschel, the centre of a large native district. But the magistrate, Captain Hook, sent a messenger to inform them that he could not be responsible for the attitude of the Fingos unless they left his district undisturbed. It is typical of the peculiar character of the war that the Boers acquiesced in the suggestion and rode on to Lady Grey, which they occupied on the 18th. For once they met with some signs of loyal opposition—and from a woman. Mrs. Sarah Glueck, the postmistress, spiritedly refused to hand over the post office, hauled up the Union Jack which the Boers had pulled down, and posted up the Governor's proclamation against treason. On the 22nd, Olivier, with a few Free Staters and a large posse of Lady Grey rebels, rode into Barkly East, where the local rebels had already gathered together and seized some 350 rifles and a quantity of ammunition in charge of the magistrate. To quote the wording of the Boer official despatches, he "annexed this splendid tract of country. The Afrikanders are much delighted and the joining of our commando is universal." Other parties meanwhile rode over the whole district west of Burghersdorp and southwards to the Zuurberg as far as Steynsburg. Altogether the burghers seem to have been much more eager to annex "splendid country," with an eye to the future acquisition of loyalists' farms, and to create administrative posts in the newly-annexed districts, than to take advantage of their military opportunities. It was not till November 26 that they actually occupied Stormberg Junction.

British positions in Eastern Cape Colony. Gatacre at Queenstown.

In all their movements in north-eastern Cape Colony up to this point the Boers had met with no interference. With the exception of the Kaffrarian Rifles, a body of volunteers from East London, stationed at Sterkstroom (with a mounted infantry outpost at Bushman's Hoek, where an important pass crosses the Stormberg mountains), a few Cape Police at Dordrecht, and an armoured train handled with skill and daring by Lieut. Gosset of the Berkshires, there were no troops north of Queenstown. The evacuation of Stormberg had raised the strength of the force at Queenstown to about 1500 of all ranks including sundry details of Cape Mounted Rifles, Cape Police and Volunteers. In addition to the two naval guns there were two obsolete 9-pounder muzzle loading field guns drawn by mules driven by a Kaffir from the limber. A further reinforcement of artillery was soon after added and included the battery of 7-pounder screw guns of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and the Maxim battery of the same excellent regiment. Except the naval guns, none of those at the disposal of the garrison were capable of meeting the modern weapons of the Boers upon anything approaching equal terms. On November 16, the Naval Brigade was sent down to the coast to be reorganised and despatched a few days later to join Methuen at Orange River. Its withdrawal at this particular moment—even though it left its two guns behind—was unfortunate. On that same day Gatacre with the Irish Rifles was landing at East London, from where he reached Queenstown on the 18th. Had the Naval Brigade been retained only a week longer the reoccupation of Stormberg might have been safely effected. Apart from all considerations of subsequent disaster, the moral effect at this moment would have been very great. The large section of prosperous Dutch farmers in the invaded districts who still hesitated about committing themselves to rebellion might have been confirmed in their practical loyalty. On the 21st, General Gatacre went up by train as far as Bushman's Hoek and as a result of his observations, the Irish Rifles, the Berkshire Mounted Infantry, and some Cape Police proceeded next day to Putter's Kraal four miles south of Sterkstroom. One is tempted to regret that he did not follow the example

given at Naauwpoort and run the risk of reoccupying Stormberg at once. As it was he did not venture beyond Bushman's Hoek, which he reinforced on the 27th by four companies of the Irish Rifles, moving his own headquarters up to Putter's Kraal on the same day. His force had, meanwhile, been strengthened by the arrival on November 23 of two companies of Colonel Alderson's battalion of Mounted Infantry, and on November 27 of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers. Brabant's Horse, though enlistment had barely been in progress a fortnight, was already becoming a useful force. Two hundred of these under Captain Montmorency, V.C., with an equal number of Cape Police were now sent up to Pen Hoek, another important pass some twelve miles east of Bushman's Hoek, to cover the British right.

Spread of rebellion. Mr. Sauer at Dordrecht.

Outside the narrow area actually held by the British troops the rebellion in the north-east of Cape Colony spread rapidly over all the countryside north of the Stormberg. The proclamation of Martial Law over a considerable part of the Colony issued by Mr. Schreiner on November 15 was, as far as most of the districts were concerned, shutting the stable door after the horse had been stolen. Its immediate proclamation at the outbreak of war followed by a general disarmament might have averted much subsequent trouble. Mr. Schreiner's unwillingness to proclaim Martial Law in time was, no doubt, due to his belief that the Free Staters would not invade Cape Colony, and to the fear that the Dutch colonists, in whose recollection Martial Law had always included the calling out of all the burghers, would suspect that they were to be compelled to fight against their own kin and thus be driven into the very rebellion which he hoped might be staved off by conciliation and sound advice till the British arms had asserted their superiority in the field. His error was one of judgment, in which he was not alone, rather than of disloyalty in intention. Still it was very galling to the military to find preparations for rebellion going on without having the power to interfere. Thus at Sterkstroom, during the first weeks of the war, the local Boers used daily to practice rifle shooting on the range, under the very noses of the garrison. A

curious commentary on Mr. Schreiner's illusions as to the effectiveness of the policy of sound advice is furnished by the incidents connected with Mr. Sauer's visit to the north-eastern districts. After an unsuccessful attempt to obtain leave from Olivier to give advice to the burghers of Barkly East, Mr. Sauer addressed a large meeting at Dordrecht on November 27 urging the inhabitants to remain loyal as the British were certain to win in the end. At the end of the meeting a deputation was chosen to visit Olivier and ask him not to enter the Dordrecht district. The deputation went, but instead of carrying out the public resolution of the meeting, they fulfilled its secret desire by making arrangements for Olivier's reception at Dordrecht, which took place on December 2.

Events in Griqualand and Bechuanaland during November. Cronje leaves Mafeking to meet Methuen.

North of the line of the Orange River the Boers showed the same inactivity during the first half of November as elsewhere. Desultory skirmishing went on round Kimberley but there was little attempt to press the town really close. On the 11th Commandant Jordaan and Judge Hertzog with a small force went on an annexation and recruiting tour through Barkly West, Campbell, Griquatown, Douglas and other places in Griqualand West. About the same time Field-Cornet Visser with 200 or 300 Transvaalers rode from Vryburg to Kuruman. But when the Boers arrived on the 13th they met with so stubborn a resistance from the handful of police and loyal "Bastards," *i.e.*, half-bloods, in the village that after a week they withdrew to Phokwane. But except for Kimberley, Kuruman and Mafeking, the whole of British Bechuanaland and Griqualand West was, in fact as in name, annexed to the two Republics. Such loyalist elements as existed were in some cases allowed to remain on condition of keeping quiet, but a great number were driven out and forced to trek south, undergoing many hardships and much worrying from Boer officials, before they reached Lord Methuen's lines on the Modder River. North of Mafeking the only events of any importance during these weeks was an attack made on the 8th by the Boers under Commandant F. A. Grobler on some 700 of Khama's Bechuanas, near Selika Kop, whose complete failure effectively safeguarded that part of the

frontier from further attempts at invasion. By the middle of the month, the Boers became anxious about the concentration of troops at Orange River for the relief of Kimberley and began to see that their operations in the north had been a mistake. Accordingly, on the 19th, the greater part of the force on the Limpopo went back from Rhodes' Drift to Pietersburg to be there reinforced by additional levies and entrained for Cape Colony. Part of these, under Eloff and von Dalwig, were however moved to Deerdepoort in consequence of a night attack made upon the Boer laager on the 25th by Captain Llewellyn and his Rhodesians. Several Boers, including Mr. Jan Barnard of the First Volksraad, were killed and a number wounded and taken prisoners. Unfortunately, on this occasion Linchwe's Kaffirs, who were lining their border while the British force operated inside Transvaal territory, crossed the border, contrary to strict orders, and took part in the attack. This and the circumstance that two women were accidentally shot in the dark were the only germs of fact underlying various horrible stories of Kaffir atrocities perpetrated at British instigation, which were freely spread abroad for the benefit of Boer sympathisers in South Africa and Europe. It was on the 19th, too, that General Cronje with some 4000 men of the Krugersdorp, Klerksdorp, and Potchefstroom commandos and the Scandinavian corps, and with the greater part of his artillery, trekked away from Mafeking, leaving Snyman with the Marico burghers and a few guns, including the Long Tom, to continue the investment. It is very characteristic of Boer methods at that stage of the war that no attempt was made to rush the town before withdrawing so large a force. Cronje and his men entrained at Klerksdorp on the 21st and were at once sent round through Johannesburg and Bloemfontein to meet Methuen's advance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NATAL ENTANGLEMENT

Investment of Ladysmith completed, Nov. 1–4.

We must now return to those events in Natal which played so important a part in disarranging the original plan of campaign. During the two days immediately following the battle of Ladysmith, active hostilities were confined to long-range artillery duels between the big gun on Pepworth and the naval guns in Ladysmith. Both sides were busy with their preparations, the Boers dragging their artillery up on to the heights commanding the town from north and east, and the British taking up defensive positions. The investment was by no means complete yet. On November 2 General Brocklehurst, with a small force, made a reconnaissance for some little distance across the plain immediately to the west of Ladysmith and shelled a Free State laager. That same afternoon General French and his staff, in pursuance of Sir R. Buller's orders, left by train for the south. The train was fired on near Pieter's Station, but succeeded in running the gauntlet—the last to do so, for a few minutes later the Boers came down to the line and tore up the rails. Before nightfall they were already shelling the town with field artillery from the slopes of Lombard's Nek. On the 3rd General Brocklehurst took out a strong cavalry force, eventually comprising almost the whole of the mounted troops in Ladysmith, with a brigade division of artillery, on a reconnaissance against the Free Staters to the west of the town. An inconsequent, haphazard action followed, in which some of the Imperial Light Horse were nearly cut off in a regular blind alley among the hills, and only rescued with difficulty by the 5th Dragoon Guards and the artillery. After some five hours' fighting the British withdrew with a loss of six killed and 28 wounded.

The chief conclusion to be drawn from the reconnaissance was that the rare qualities essential to a cavalry leader were lacking in the officer to whom General French's departure had left the command of the mounted troops in Ladysmith. On the 4th Sir G. White asked Joubert to allow hospital trains with wounded and non-combatants to proceed to the south unmolested. This request Joubert naturally refused, but he courteously consented to the formation of a neutral camp for the reception of sick, wounded and non-combatants on the plain in front of Bulwana, and an armistice till the evening of the 5th was agreed upon for their removal.

British at Colenso fall back on Estcourt. Nov. 2–3.

Meanwhile, on November 1, a detachment of the Free Staters demonstrated against Colenso. From the Grobler's Kloof heights they shelled the garrison which had constructed intrenchments on a small hill, since known as Fort Wylie, on the north bank of the river. The guns of the Natal Field Artillery were, as on the morning of Elandslaagte, quite incapable of replying to the more modern weapons of the Boers. An advanced company of the Durban Light Infantry, guarding the bridge over the Langverwacht Spruit some three or four miles nearer Ladysmith, was with difficulty withdrawn. The shelling was repeated the next day, and in the evening Colonel Cooper, of the Dublin Fusiliers, prudently decided to fall back on Estcourt, some twenty-five miles back, as the position at the foot of the Colenso heights was untenable by so small a force. The retirement was carried out during the night and in the early hours of November 3. The total force now assembled at Estcourt, under Brigadier-General Wolfe-Murray, in command of the lines of communication in Natal, amounted to about 2300 men, of whom less than 300 were mounted.* These Wolfe-Murray, during the next few days, tried to equip and organise as a field force, no easy task with the limited resources at his disposal.

Umvoti Rifles at Tugela Ferry, Oct. 28–Nov. 18.

In north-eastern Natal, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, under

* The force consisted of the Border Regiment, just arrived from Cape Colony, the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, the Durban Light Infantry, a squadron each of the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Carbineers, a mounted infantry company of the 2nd 60th, a mounted section of Dublin Fusiliers who had escaped sharing Möller's fate at Talana, a useful detachment of Natal Police, and the Natal Field Artillery.

Major Leuchars, about ninety strong, had retired from Helpmakaar to Pomeroy on October 23. On the 26th they fell back on the Tugela ferry, where they remained for the next three weeks, though still patrolling north of the Tugela as far as Pomeroy, and skirmishing with parties of the Pietretief and Bethel commandos who had entered the village on the 28th, sacking it and destroying most of the houses.

Defenceless state of Natal.

The situation in Natal was one of the greatest anxiety. The Boers were within eighty miles of Maritzburg. Beyond the small and immobile force at Estcourt, there was practically nothing to stop their advancing directly on the capital of the colony, or even on Durban. The Imperial troops were still on the Atlantic; the bulk of the volunteer forces of the colony were shut up with Sir G. White. There were rifle associations in most of the country districts, and it might have been possible to call these out and send them up to Estcourt at once.* But the step was not taken. On the one hand, the fear of native risings, or doubts as to the value of these corps, may have deterred the military from availing themselves of their services. On the other, splendidly patriotic as Natal showed itself through every stage of this long struggle, it still, in the main, looked to the Imperial forces for its defence. If Natal had possessed a commando organisation like the Transvaal, with an adequate supply of military stores, it could have found men enough to hold the line of the Tugela unaided against the overflow of the Boer forces from Ladysmith. But Natal was, like the mother country, an unmilitary state, and patriotic improvisation—a poor substitute for that whole-hearted concentration of the national energy given by law-enforced universal service—was all it could rely on for its defence till the Imperial forces arrived. Immediately after the battle of Ladysmith, the Hon. T. K. (now Sir Thomas) Murray began getting together a force from the members of rifle associations. By November 2 about 80 men of Murray's Horse reached Mooi River and, subsequently increased to about 150 men,

* Martial Law had already been proclaimed all over the colony on October 23, the Natal Ministry showing itself in this respect much readier to meet the views of the military authorities than the Cape Ministry.

patrolled the country for a fortnight, when, on the arrival of reinforcements, they were disbanded. The recruiting and training of Thorneycroft's and Bethune's mounted infantry corps, sanctioned by Sir G. White, was rapidly pushed forward at Maritzburg and Durban, and the formation of an Uitlander infantry battalion, the Imperial Light Infantry, was now authorised by Sir R. Buller. Except miscellaneous details and convalescents belonging to Sir G. White's force, there were no troops in Maritzburg. It was impossible to man the long line of lofty heights almost encircling the town, and the fortification of the military camp at Fort Napier, just above the railway-station, with earthworks, bales of compressed forage and barbed wire entanglements, partook somewhat of the comic, though it served its purpose of reassuring the civilian population. The arrival of two 12-pounders and a 7-pounder with 25 men from H.M.S. *Tartar* did still more in the same direction. Durban was the only place that was really adequately defended. The *Terrible* had arrived there on the 6th, and its energetic and irrepressible commander, Captain Percy Scott, had taken over the post of commandant. By the 8th 28 guns,* drawn from the *Terrible*, *Thetis*, *Tartar* and *Forte*, were posted to command all the land approaches to the town. Besides the contingents from the ships, a number of the townspeople were organised to assist in the defences and to patrol the country round. The work was extremely well done, but as matters stood it would have been better if Captain Scott and his guns had been sent up to Mooi River or Estcourt, where they would have been of more immediate service. But the not unreasonable reluctance of the Admiralty to acquiesce in the locking-up of the armament of its ships in the interior of South Africa had yet to be overcome.

Boers occupied north of Tugela. Estcourt equally inactive. Nov. 3–14.

For the moment, however, there was no sign of active operations south of the Tugela. The Boers were too absorbed in the task of investing Ladysmith, and spreading themselves over Northern Natal, to give any thought to the great opportunities open to them if they made a rapid push southwards. A constant stream of trains, bringing

* Two 4·7 inch, sixteen 12 cwt. 12-pounders, two 8 cwt. 12-pounders, one 9-pounder, one 7-pounder, two Nordenfeldts and four Maxims.

supplies and reinforcements of burghers and artillery, came down from Pretoria to the head laager at Modderspruit. Magistrates were appointed in all the villages. Patrols rode round enlisting recruits among the Dutch farmers or assuring themselves of their friendly neutrality. The British at Estcourt were equally inactive, but with more reason. The fact is that a small force of infantry was quite unfitted for the task of keeping in touch with a mobile enemy, unless it was prepared to allow itself to be invested. If only Sir G. White had kept the Dublin Fusiliers in Ladysmith and sent out his cavalry! Under the circumstances Estcourt was as near the enemy as General Wolfe-Murray could trust himself. From there he might to some extent bluff the enemy, and endeavour to keep up communication with Ladysmith by native runners or by heliograph,* and yet succeed in falling back if in serious danger of being surrounded. Later on, as reinforcements arrived, Estcourt would form a convenient place of assembly for the troops that were to relieve Sir G. White, and would be near enough to enable a helping hand to be given him if he was forced to break his way out. Meanwhile, to keep up some demonstration of activity, an armoured train was daily sent up the line to Colenso, and slight skirmishes took place on the 5th and subsequent days. But as late as the 9th the village was not yet regularly occupied by the Boers.

Boers decide on expedition south of Tugela.

This inactivity was not to the taste of the younger and more enterprising leaders of the Boers. Louis Botha, who since Meyer's departure had been definitely nominated Assistant-General in command of Meyer's division, was their chief spokesman, and urged the necessity of taking the offensive, in order to check the advance of the reinforcements known to be coming from the Cape. Joubert yielded to the pressure put upon him, and consented to an advance south of the Tugela, but, to make sure that the enterprise

* Heliographic communication was secured, though not till the first days of December, by the enterprise of Captain J. S. Cayzer, who established a station on Mount Umkolumba, a lofty hill near Weenen. Before that, on November 25, direct communication from Estcourt and Frere was established by a search-light with flashing apparatus provided by Captain Percy Scott.

should be conducted with due caution, decided to accompany the expedition himself. A picked and well-mounted force, from 3000 to 3500 strong, composed of detachments of the Krugersdorp, Boksburg, Heidelberg, Standerton, Ermelo Carolina, Middelburg, Vryheid, and Utrecht commandos, and the Johannesburg police, and the Senekal, Vrede, and Frankfort Free Staters, with four or five guns, was collected at Colenso on the 13th and 14th. Smaller skirmishing and foraging parties had already been scouring the country for a dozen miles round Colenso during the last few days, and on the 14th strong patrols pushed on to Chieveley, and as far as the Estcourt-Weenen road, within four or five miles of Estcourt itself.

Nov. 14. Boer patrols near Estcourt. Alarm at Estcourt and Maritzburg.

Estcourt had been reinforced on the 13th by the arrival of the West Yorkshires, and on the 14th, as the result of a short visit of inspection by General Hildyard on the 13th, by the two 12-pounders and 7-pounder of the *Tartar* from Maritzburg, and was now in a better condition to meet any attack. But it was still very far from being confident. The undue contempt in which the Boers had been held by most soldiers before the war had, after the battle of Ladysmith, given way to a greater respect for their prowess and to the most imaginative estimates of their numbers. The absence of an adequately organised field intelligence with the scratch force at Estcourt—part of the ridiculously inadequate provision in money and men made, at this stage of the war, for the most important branch of any fighting force—added greatly to the general nervousness. A dense, paralysing mist of uncertainty enveloped all things beyond a narrow radius from the village. The appearance of the Boer patrols on the 14th was the signal for a display of nervous irresolution, profoundly depressing to those who watched it, and full of portent for any one who reflected upon the future course of the campaign. At the first alarm the whole force almost was sent on to the hills east of the town, to stay the enemy's onset, while tents were struck and wagons packed for immediate retreat if the enemy proved too strong. Then a moment of confidence and the tents were pitched again on ground which the pouring rain had meanwhile converted

MAJOR-GENERAL H. J. T. HILDYARD, C.B.,

COMMANDING 2ND BRIGADE.

From Photo by C. Knight, Aldershot.

MAJOR-GENERAL G. BARTON, C.B.,

COMMANDING 6TH BRIGADE.

From Photo by Bassano.

into a swamp. A passing cloud of despondency, and down once more fluttered the white walls and packing-up was resumed. All day and late into the night, amid streaming rain, Estcourt hovered between scuttling and not scuttling, inclining ever more and more to the former, while anxious communications with Maritzburg—the true begetter of its irresolution—passed to and fro over the wires. The naval guns, which had been posted in the morning on a rise west of the line, were brought down to the station and put on the trucks. But at the last moment Colonel Long, R.A., who was in temporary command, Wolfe-Murray having gone down to Maritzburg on the 10th to superintend the arrival of Hildyard's brigade, insisted on staying, and fighting if need be. After all the only enemy with whom his mounted men had come in contact during the day had been mere patrols who showed little inclination to fight. In a minute the atmosphere of retreat was dispelled, and the whole force went contentedly to sleep.*

Nov. 15. Armoured train sent out.

Early next morning the armoured train was sent up the line again, primarily to reconnoitre, but also to fight an action, if necessary. For this purpose it was manned by a company each of the Dublin Fusiliers and Durban Light Infantry, some 150 men in all; six men of the *Tartar*, with the naval 7-pounder on an open truck, and a handful of platelayers to repair the line if required. It is typical of British military methods that, though the train had been running up to Chieveley or Colenso almost daily, the officer selected to command, Captain A. Haldane, D.S.O., of the Gordons, had never been up the line before. That the train was certain to be caught in a trap, sooner or later, was the outspoken conviction of every officer in Estcourt, but no precautions were taken to accompany it by a few mounted men

* In drawing this picture of the helplessness and vacillation of Maritzburg and Estcourt on November 14, or indeed of the whole of the Natal forces during the Boer raid south of the Tugela, there is no intention to throw special blame on the British officers concerned, many of whom were able on later occasions to give proof of their capacity. The fault lay with the lack of information and mobility, and for that the blame must fall mainly on a system which had long neglected the things most essential in warfare, and on a nation indifferent to military efficiency.

to scout on both sides of the railway. As a means of quickly moving infantry about, or of providing cover to them against an enemy unprovided with artillery, armoured trains may be most serviceable. They had already been used with success in Bechuanaland, and were destined to play an important part in the later stages of the war. But for reconnoitring purposes, except on perfectly flat country, little reliance can be put in them. Between Estcourt and Colenso the line ran like a switchback, up and down a number of narrow valleys, with hardly a point from which an unbroken view of 800 yards on either side could be obtained. On the other hand, even when it was hidden in cuttings the puffing of its approach could be heard for miles. The particular train in question was of the most primitive character, consisting simply of open trucks boxed in with loopholed walls of thick boiler plate to a height of seven feet from the floor of the trucks. It would be hard to devise a better target than a soldier laboriously climbing in or out of that death-trap.

Boers lay ambush for train near Frere.

General Joubert's expedition had started trekking from Colenso before dawn that same morning. An advanced party under Adjutant B. Van der Merwe had nearly reached Frere when the ill-fated train was heard puffing along in the distance. The Boers at once concealed themselves. After a halt at Frere to consult with a picket of Natal Police, Captain Haldane, finding all quiet, pushed on to Chieveley. No sooner had the train passed on than the Boers made their preparations. Large numbers of them had hurried up, and, knowing what was in the wind, had taken care to keep the kopjes near the line between themselves and the unsuspecting train. A long steep slope a mile and a half from Frere was chosen for the execution of their plans. Towards the bottom of the slope the line curved sharply towards Frere, a guide rail along the curve being placed there to prevent trains running off the rails. The Boers filled up the space between the guide rail and the rail next to it with stones to help the train to run off if it was at all hurried—and they meant to hurry it. On both sides of the line a broad glacis-like slope extended 100 to 800 yards up to higher ground, and on the edges of this the Boers posted three guns and a "pom-pom,"

and spread themselves out. When all was ready they lay down in the pouring rain, philosophically smoked their pipes, and waited for the train to return.

Capture of the armoured train.

Meanwhile the train puffed on to Chieveley. From the station parties of Boers—as a matter of fact the rearguard of the main body, which was already laagering near the scene of the intended surprise—were seen some little way off moving southwards. After reporting by telegraph to Colonel Long, Haldane steamed back. As the train entered the mouth of the trap prepared for it the Boers opened fire with their guns and Mausers. As they had expected the engine-driver turned on full steam and dashed down the incline. At the corner the leading trucks jumped off the line, two of them capsizing completely, and the third remaining jammed across the track in front of the engine, which was in the middle of the train. The sailors at once replied to the enemy's fire with their 7-pounder from the rear truck, but before many seconds the little gun was knocked clean off its carriage. While the Dublin Fusiliers and Durban Light Infantry scrambled out and pluckily tried, under Haldane's direction, to keep down the enemy's fire, Mr. Winston Churchill, who was present as correspondent of the *Morning Post*, led a brave little party of volunteers in an effort to clear the line in front of the engine. For over an hour they toiled away, shells and bullets playing furiously upon them. At last things were so far clear that the engine could ram its way past the corner of the overturned truck. The engine and tender got through, but the heavy trucks behind stuck at the impediment, and the couplings parted. Further attempts to move the trucks were fruitless. The engine had been struck several times, and the boiler might be burst by a shell any moment. The only thing to be done was to get the engine away. The wounded were lifted on board, and the engine steamed slowly towards Frere. Haldane made his men run alongside, hoping, if possible, to get back to Frere. But the fire was too hot. To save itself the engine had to increase its pace, and the men fell behind, Haldane and Churchill staying to rally them. A few minutes more and all was over. The Boers galloped down and took

some 70 prisoners, including Haldane, Churchill,* and Lieutenant Frankland of the Dublins. There were in all five killed and 45 wounded. Twenty wounded and 70 unwounded escaped with the engine, or struggled back during the day. The Boers lost two killed and five wounded. A handful of mounted troops who had arrived post haste from Estcourt were too late to save the situation, but kept up a skirmishing fight for some time against superior numbers.

Nov. 15–20. Boers move round Estcourt in two bodies.

The Boers, elated by their success, now prepared to push on. A direct advance on Estcourt was not part of Joubert's plan. He preferred, by marching round and planting himself across the railway on the high ground between Estcourt and Mooi River, to have it in his power either to fall upon the isolated garrison of Estcourt or to threaten a sudden raid upon Maritzburg. With this purpose he divided his force in two, sending about 1000 men with two guns, under his nephew, Assistant-General David Joubert of the Carolina commando, round to the east of Estcourt, while he himself with Louis Botha and the rest of the force worked round to the west. A small detachment was left behind to "feel" Estcourt from the north, and keep it occupied till the move was completed. That so cautious a commander as Piet Joubert did not hesitate to divide his force in order to march round an enemy numerically of equal strength, expecting strong reinforcements, and in command of the railway, is typical of the justifiable contempt the Boers felt for British immobility. The Boer advance itself was carried out in perfectly leisurely fashion, the commandos spreading freely over the rich grazing lands of Weenen county, right up to the Drakensberg, looting great herds of cattle, collecting abundant supplies, and making utter havoc of all unoccupied farmhouses. A German participator in the expedition happily described it as a "Lumpen-Kreuzzug," *i.e.* a "Tramps' Crusade." On the 17th D. Joubert entered Weenen unopposed, the Boers, in spite of the efforts of their officers to prevent them, sacking the village inn and some of the stores.

* Both Haldane and Churchill made good their escape from prison at different times, but in equally adventurous fashions, and found their way to the front again.

On the 19th, after a skirmish between some of his men and the British patrols from Mooi River, he took up a position on high ground some five miles east of Highlands, the next station north of Mooi River, and there waited, somewhat anxiously, for the arrival of the main body. The latter had meanwhile worked round through Ulundi, fifteen miles south-west of Estcourt, in which district they lifted many thousand cattle on the 18th and 19th, and were now pushing in a south-easterly direction towards the railway at Highlands.

Hildyard misses opportunity of preventing Boer junction. Nov. 21.

The Boers were too late to prevent the reinforcement of Estcourt. On the 16th General Hildyard and his staff arrived with the 2nd Queen's and the 2nd East Surrey. More important still the next two days saw the arrival of the 7th Field Battery and of Bethune's Mounted Infantry. The mounted forces at Estcourt now numbered nearly 800 men, and were put under Lieutenant-Colonel Martyr, D.S.O. In view of the evident likelihood of an attempt to cut the line south of Estcourt, and in order to keep touch with Barton at Mooi River, the West Yorks and some of the mounted troops were moved down to Willow Grange on the 17th, but recalled on the 19th to avoid dispersion of the force. On the 18th the Boer patrols on the north came within 8000 yards of Estcourt along the railway, but a shell from one of the naval guns bursting in their midst warned them to keep at a more respectful distance. They had succeeded, however, in maintaining the impression that the main Boer force would attack Estcourt directly from the north-west and west and so keeping the garrison on the defensive. On the 19th Martyr, who had located D. Joubert's laager, applied for permission to capture it by a night attack, an idea which met with General Hildyard's approval. Towards midnight of the 20th five companies of the Borders and three of the East Surreys, with two of the Natal guns and 450 of Martyr's men, the whole under Lieutenant-Colonel Hinde of the Borders, assembled at Willow Grange for the projected attack. But at the last moment the officer in command hesitated. Messages flashed to and fro between Estcourt and Willow Grange, while the men shivered and coughed on the damp grass and wondered when they were

to start. Before a decision had been come to, day broke. Later in the morning Hildyard came over to Willow Grange, and led the weary infantry for a five-mile promenade to look at the Boer position. At midday the infantry marched back, and the mounted force, whose horses had been standing with their saddles on most of the time since 3 A.M., rode out by the same dusty road to have their look at the position. While out there Martyr, hearing from Barton's patrol at Highlands that a large force of Boers was coming down to the line west of that station, detached some of his men to observe them. Meanwhile, about 4 P.M., the infantry resting at Willow Grange suddenly became aware of a party of Boers on the crest of Brynbella Hill, a long and grassy ridge west of the station rising some 1000 feet above it and running due west for two or three miles. The troops were hurriedly sent to hold some lower kopjes immediately above the station, but were soon called down again. Colonel Hinde was not unnaturally afraid of getting caught between the Boer forces on both sides of him. So a hasty retreat on Estcourt was effected, the returning mounted troops covering the movement. The Boer forces now effected an undisturbed junction, and, after breaking up the line at Highlands and Willow Grange, spread themselves over all the heights from Brynbella Hill south and south-east to D. Joubert's original position. Thus ended an extraordinarily futile operation. The isolated position of D. Joubert's force offered a rare opportunity which was allowed to escape. It is not easy to say why more troops and better guns could not have been sent down, if there was any doubt as to the Boer strength, or why nearly the whole force might not have abandoned Estcourt for twenty-four hours in order to strike a decisive blow.

Barton's nervousness at Mooi River.

Even more difficult is it to understand why no attempt at co-operation was made by General Barton from Mooi River, only twenty-two miles from Estcourt and barely ten from D. Joubert's camp. Barton had arrived on the 18th with the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, preceded on the 16th by the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers, and followed on the 19th by the 14th

Battery, R.F.A., and on the 20th by the 2nd Devonshires. On the 19th three companies of Thorneycroft's had been engaged with D. Joubert as already mentioned, and during the greater part of the 20th these companies with half a battalion of infantry and four guns were on the heights north-east of Mooi River, within easy striking distance of the enemy. But if Estcourt hesitated in the execution of its plans for attack, Mooi River was not for attacking at all. The fact is General Barton was decidedly nervous, and his chief concern seemed to be to defend the station and bridge at Mooi River at all hazards against the overwhelming forces which he believed to be advancing upon him.

Nov. 22 and 23. Boers shell Mooi River.

The "overwhelming forces" in question, viz., D. Joubert's commando, had been dreading an attack hardly less anxiously, and with better reason. But after regaining touch with the main force under the Commandant-General on the 21st they recovered their confidence. While the greater part of the main force was engaged in watching Estcourt, and in sending foraging and cattle-raiding patrols down into the upper valley of the Mooi River and almost to Nottingham Road—where, however, their further advance was checked by the active scouting of the local farmers who had promptly mobilised in defence of their homes, and by the arrival of the first battalions of Lyttelton's brigade—D. Joubert's men advanced early on the 22nd on to the ridge which had been held by Thorneycroft's the day before, and playfully dropped shells from their two guns into the station yard at Mooi River. The British replied with their artillery, and the troops were sent out, but the heavy storm of rain which fell in the afternoon put an end to the engagement. On this occasion D. Joubert was supported by Louis Botha and part of the main force. But on the 23rd, D. Joubert on his ridge, and a few patrols reported some miles south of Mooi River, repeated the process of keeping Barton occupied with equal success while Botha was engaged with Hildyard at Willow Grange, and thus prevented any co-operation of the British forces.

Nov. 22. Hildyard decides to attack Boers on Brynbella.

Hildyard, however, had no intention of waiting patiently till he was shelled. Discovering on the 22nd that the Boers had planted one of their guns on the eastern end of Brynbella

and were themselves camped there in some force, he decided, on the advice of Major D. McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers, to make that point his objective for a night attack. The execution of this operation was entrusted to Colonel F. W. Kitchener, commanding the West Yorks, who on the afternoon of the 22nd took with him, besides his own battalion, seven companies of East Surreys and four each of the Queen's and the Durban Light Infantry, the 7th Field Battery, and one naval 12-pounder. Five companies of the Borders and the mounted troops were to move out in support before daybreak on the 23rd. During a drenching storm the troops marched some five or six miles to the base of a steep conical hill, generally known as Beacon Hill, to the west of the Estcourt-Willow Grange Road and about 5000 yards north of the Boer position on Brynbella, from which Brynbella could be reached without descending right down into the Willow Grange valley. Here Hildyard joined Kitchener and took over the command, leaving to the latter only the two battalions, West Yorks and East Surreys, which were to carry out the actual night attack. The general idea for the 23rd seems to have been that Kitchener, once established on the end of Brynbella, should act as a pivot on the left round which Hildyard was to swing the rest of his force so as to drive the Boers off Brynbella down to Highlands and so into Barton's arms. Some of the troops exposed themselves on the flanks of Beacon Hill just before sunset, drawing the fire of the Boer gun, to which the naval gun, which with great difficulty had been hauled up the steep reverse of the hill, unfortunately replied. This warned the Boers that some serious move was contemplated, and their gun, whose capture was to have been one of the chief results of the night attack, was withdrawn by the lieutenant in charge of it at 2 A.M. The storm which had been raging in the afternoon began with renewed vigour after nightfall. For hours the men lay in the open in their thin khaki drill, drenched through and through with the sluicing downpour, and bruised all over with the stinging hail. Among the Boers on Brynbella one burgher and several horses were killed by lightning.

Soon after 11 P.M. Colonel Kitchener took his two battalions across to the base of Brynbella.* During this march some of the East Surreys mistook some of the West Yorks for Boers and there was a moment of confusion, during which several men were wounded by rifle or bayonet. It is doubtful whether the Boers heard this firing. Anyhow, Colonel Kitchener pushed on, and, having assembled his men, sent them up along both sides of a stone wall which ran from in front of Beacon Hill up the north-eastern corner of Brynbella on to the crest. Led with great coolness and judgment up the steep hill-side by Major Hobbs of the West Yorks the men scrambled up to the top unperceived. The Boers at this end of Brynbella were only a small party, some 150 Free Staters from Vrede and 50 Johannesburg police. As the British topped the crest the startled Boer sentry challenged in a loud voice. The reply was a volley —contrary to orders—and a ringing cheer from the West Yorks, who rushed over his body on the laager. But the firing had given the Boers just enough time to escape along the ridge, and all the British had captured was a heap of blankets and saddlery and some thirty or forty ponies. It was now about 3.30. As soon as it became a little lighter Colonel Kitchener placed a firing line of West Yorks among the boulders on the highest part of the crest, withdrawing the rest behind the wall. The Boers, who had fallen back to an eminence on the ridge some 1500 yards further back, and were reinforced by the Krugersdorp commando led by Louis Botha and by Commandants Potgieter and Oosthuizen, now began to attack the British perched on the edge of the hill. Their fire was quite harmless for the first two hours, but gradually they crept up closer on both sides of the hill, while their guns, two field-pieces and a "pom-pom," were moved so as to bring a converging fire to bear on the narrow position on which the British were perched. Kitchener looked round anxiously for the artillery to support him, but beyond an occasional shell from the naval gun on Beacon Hill, which from its position could only search the northern

Nov. 23, 3.30 A.M. Col. Kitchener takes end of Brynbella, but being unsupported eventually retires.

* They were admirably guided by Mr. Chapman, a local farmer, who unfortunately lost his life in the engagement.

slopes of Brynbella, no support was forthcoming. As a matter of fact the 7th Battery was lying idle at the foot of Beacon Hill; its commanding officer had been given no instructions on the preceding evening, not even the information that Brynbella was to be attacked, and had received no order that morning except to stay where he was. Not thinking it any use to try and hold on further, Kitchener decided towards 9 A.M. to abandon his hold on Brynbella and ordered his men to retire down the hill, partly towards Beacon Hill, where a small intervening kopje offered cover, and partly down to a small plantation in the Willow Grange Valley.

Retirement gallantly covered by Light Horse.

The rest of the infantry were meanwhile collected on the crest of Beacon Hill near the naval gun, where they were separated by 5000 yards of open valley from any point where they might have been of use in supporting Kitchener. Of the mounted troops, Bethune's Mounted Infantry moved out about 5 A.M. along a path leading westwards among smaller kopjes to the north of Beacon Hill, thus forming the extreme right of the British line. On the extreme left Martyr with the remaining squadrons had patrolled the valley below Willow Grange and kept in check parties of Boers moving up from Highlands. Just about the time when Kitchener was meditating his retreat from Brynbella, General Hildyard, who had arrived in the morning, independently came to the same decision. He now ordered Colonel Hinde on Beacon Hill to send forward the Queen's and Borders till the left of their firing-line joined on to Kitchener's position. They advanced about a mile, lining the wall which has already been referred to as running on to the end of Brynbella from in front of Beacon Hill, and were freely shelled by the Boer "pom-pom" and by a long-range gun some 7000 yards or more to the west of them on some heights where General Joubert and the main Boer force were posted. The naval gun on Beacon Hill tried to reply but fell short. The Boer gun, however, diverted its attention from the infantry, and, to show its superiority of range, freely shelled the summit of Beacon Hill. Martyr was at the same time ordered to help Kitchener's retirement on the left. He at once took his men up Brynbella from Willow

Grange, the Imperial Light Horse, under Captain Bottomley, leading. When the Light Horsemen got up they found only one company of West Yorks still left on the crest. Lining up at the wall they held back the Boers who were hotly pressing the retreat, and concentrating an intense shell, pom-pom, and rifle-fire on the position. When the infantry retirement was completed and most of the wounded had been carried down to the foot of the hill, Martyr had to think of getting his own gallant little handful of men away. The artillery had now moved forward to a position in which it could cover the retreat and prevent the Boers rushing the crest the moment our men left it. Suddenly it was seen to limber up and withdraw, leaving the men on Brynbella to take their chance. This was due to an order from Hildyard, who seems not to have realised what was happening on Brynbella and wished to cover the withdrawal of the infantry further to the right. There was nothing else to do, so Martyr told his men to run down to their horses. Before they got there the Boers were over the edge of the hill and blazing down at them. Luckily their excitement or the plunging fire upset their aim, and the troopers got away with very few casualties.* A few minutes later the Boers had got their gun—the one for whose sake the night attack had been planned—back on the end of the hill and were shelling the retreating horsemen.

11 A.M. British withdraw to Estcourt shelled by Boers.

The whole force was now falling back on the Beacon Hill position and about eleven o'clock General Hildyard decided to withdraw to Estcourt. He originally intended to retain his hold on Beacon Hill, which was within 7000 yards of Estcourt, but owing to some misapprehension the naval gun was removed and it was not thought worth while to replace it. As the troops fell back the Boer long-range gun freely dropped shells among them at ranges from 10,000 to 12,000 yards. The total casualties for the day had been sixteen killed and over sixty wounded, chiefly in the West Yorks. Major Hobbs and seven men of the West Yorks, who stayed too long on

* It was at this moment that Trooper G. FitzPatrick, brother of the well-known author of 'The Transvaal from Within,' was killed while helping down a wounded Yorkshireman.

Brynbella looking after the wounded, were made prisoners. The Boer casualties were perhaps a quarter of the British. Botha had his horse shot under him while leading his men to the counter-attack. The Boers had some 2000, the British 5000 in the field, but on neither side was more than a small portion of these forces actively engaged; as far as the British were concerned, the centre, the mounted troops on the right, and the artillery might almost equally well have been away.

Willow Grange unsatisfactory engagement.

Willow Grange was an unsatisfactory engagement. The night attack was skilfully carried out, but its objective had unfortunately been removed. The rest of the action was purposeless, confused and without direction, though the troops actually engaged on Brynbella behaved extraordinarily well in a trying position. Sir R. Buller, however, was so impressed by the complete transformation in the Natal situation between the 22nd, the day he left Cape Town, and the date of his arrival at Maritzburg, which he attributed entirely to this action, that he treated the Willow Grange affair in his despatches as a brilliant victory won over 7000 Boers. The Boers, with better reason, claimed that they had without difficulty repelled an attack in force by the Estcourt garrison. Estcourt was depressed, and on the evening of the battle was already counting up its stores in view of the possibility of a prolonged investment, and expecting momentarily to see the muzzle of the Boer long-range gun showing itself on Beacon Hill and dropping its shells into the village.

Boers, for various reasons, decide to return to Colenso and do so unmolested. Nov. 24–27.

However, the Boers themselves were getting anxious. They could hardly hope to continue indefinitely between two British forces each much larger than their own. Sooner or later their weakness would be found out. The 24th saw fresh troop trains and naval guns arriving at Mooi River, as their scouts duly reported. Messengers from Colenso brought the news of Methuen's march and of his first success at Belmont —news which made advisable the transfer of some of the Free State commandos to that front—apparently also of Buller's coming round to Natal. After three or four days of incessant rain the Tugela would be in full flood, and, if the British were to cut off their retreat to Colenso, they would be caught in a trap. Louis Botha, indeed, at the Krygs-

Map of NORTHERN NATAL

showing the Boer Invasion and the movements of Troops down to the end of 1899.

DIRECTIONS

Railways

British — The continuous lines indicate advances, the dotted lines retreats

Boers — The continuous lines indicate advances, the dotted lines retreats

Camps or Headquarters of larger Forces.

Patrols & skirmishing parties.

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raad held that afternoon, was for leaving Estcourt and Mooi River alone and marching straight on Maritzburg, but Joubert and the other commandants could not rise to such audacious strategy, and decided to retreat to Colenso. The Commandant-General's usual caution may have been accentuated by physical suffering. He had just sustained a serious internal injury, due to his horse stumbling, and had to be conveyed on the retreat in a closed carriage. On the 24th the Boer foraging parties were still out over all the countryside. On the 25th a patrol of Thorneycroft's, which moved out from Mooi River, was met by a vigorous artillery and rifle-fire. But the retreat had already begun. Joubert, on this occasion, was disinclined to split up his force, and with the exception of the small Free State contingent under Commandant Schutte, which returned by Ulundi, the whole body returned by Weenen. It was a dangerous and difficult march. The expedition had come out lightly equipped. It returned heavy with hundreds of wagons of looted goods and droves upon droves of raided cattle, a great straggling procession, whose head had almost reached Weenen before its tail lost touch with Mooi River. The roads were sodden with the heavy rains, and on one occasion their big gun was stuck for ten hours in a drift. For some miles the track to Weenen led through a defile where a handful of men could have checked the whole force. But nothing happened. On the 26th the main body passed through Weenen, and by the evening of the 27th the whole expedition, with all its plunder, had made its way back safe and unmolested to Colenso.

British move up to Frere without attempting to pursue Boers.

The Boer retreat was discovered by the British almost at once. On the 25th little was done, though some of the mounted troops from Estcourt, patrolling out towards Ulundi, came in touch with the retiring Free Staters. About midnight, Barton, who had been keeping his men standing to arms night and day since the 22nd, in momentary anticipation of being rushed, realised that the danger was past, and ordered Lord Dundonald to march up to Estcourt with two battalions, a battery, and some of Thorneycroft's. Later on, during the course of the morning of the 26th, the railway and telegraph between Mooi River and Estcourt was repaired,

the bulk of the Mooi River troops marched up to Estcourt, while the Estcourt garrison, joined by Dundonald, advanced and occupied Frere. Why no attempt was made to molest the Boer retreat is almost incomprehensible. It is true that the mounted forces, both at Estcourt and Mooi River, were small, and had been very hard worked, but even fifty troopers can very effectively harass a retreat, and, considering the much greater distance the Boers had to go, the infantry ought to have found little difficulty in getting to Colenso first, and at the least forcing the Boers to disgorge their spoils. Apart from an attempt to cut off the Boer retreat, the mere advance on Frere had little to recommend it as a strategical move. It only served to "show the hand" of the force that was to relieve Ladysmith.

Concentration at Frere. Nov. 26–Dec. 15.

The advance to Frere met with practically no opposition; but the small Boer force which had kept in touch with Estcourt on the north took the precaution of blowing up the railway bridge over the Blaauwkrantz at Frere, a piece of work very artistically carried out by the employees of the Netherlands Railway. On the 27th small parties of Boers demonstrated against the British outposts towards Chieveley in order to cover the undisturbed retreat of Joubert's force across the Colenso bridge. On the 28th General Clery came up to inspect the camp, but did not actually take over the command from Hildyard till December 5. At daybreak that same morning (28th), Lord Dundonald, now in command of all the mounted troops, advanced along the railway with some 900 men and a field battery. After driving away the Boer outposts north of Chieveley, the force deployed across the plain in front of Colenso, and advanced to within 1500 yards of the village, the artillery meanwhile freely shelling the kopjes across the Tugela. This demonstration drew a fairly heavy but harmless fire from several Boer guns posted on the Colenso heights. Having thus established the fact that the Boers were taking up a strong defensive position behind the Tugela, Dundonald returned to camp. The Boers now blew up the railway bridge over the Tugela and prepared for the British attack. But for the next fortnight nothing was to happen in the camp at Frere beyond the

constant arrival of troops and guns and train-loads of supplies till all was ready for the march on Ladysmith.

Action at Tugela Ferry, Nov. 23. End of first period of war.

While the main Boer invasion south of the Tugela was going on, an attempt was made by a smaller force of 300–400 men, advancing from Helpmakaar and Pomeroy, to cross the river lower down at the Tugela Ferry. The Umvoti Mounted Rifles had fallen back almost to Greytown after the Boer occupation of Weenen, but keeping their outposts out at the ferry, and, in conjunction with the Natal Police, on Mount Umkolumba east of Weenen. On the 23rd the Boers attempted to force the ferry. But, aided by the swollen river, the outposts managed to hold their own till Major Leuchars arrived with the rest of his little force, and after some hours' fighting the Boers withdrew. Still further east the Boers, early in November, had occupied several border magistracies of Zululand, and a small commando, moving through Swaziland, had actually entered Zambaansland. But these were petty raids of no military importance. The military situation at the end of November may be summed up by saying that Natal, south of the Tugela, was cleared of the Boers. The first stage of the war, marked by the advance of the Boers into British territory, was now over. In Natal, as on the western theatre of war, the Republican forces were on the defensive, determined to retain their hold on the territories they had invaded and annexed, and to starve out the British garrisons they had invested. The next stage, marked by the first unsuccessful attempt of the British to oust them from their positions, was now to begin. The tide had turned, but much was yet to happen before it could start flowing towards Pretoria.

CHAPTER IX

LORD METHUEN'S MARCH TO MODDER RIVER

Reasons why Methuen's force was thought sufficient.

At the end of a week spent in assembling and organising his forces at Orange River, Lord Methuen had what was considered to be a sufficient force with which to begin his march to Kimberley. He had over 8000 men available, and if necessary could be reinforced by the Highland Brigade, at that moment still distributed along the line of communications, and by the 12th Lancers, who had not yet come up from Cape Town. There can be little doubt that if the magnitude of the task set to Lord Methuen had been at all realised at Headquarters, Sir Redvers Buller would never have undertaken the relief of Kimberley, but would have used all his troops in order to clear Cape Colony south of the Orange River, relying on Kekewich's ability to hold out till affairs in Natal were settled and till the main army could move on Bloemfontein. But at the time the relief of Kimberley was decided on it seemed a very natural move. It was not supposed that the Boers could get together more than 4000–5000 men at the most to bar Methuen's progress. Cronje, it must be remembered, was still besieging Mafeking, three hundred miles away. The intervening country offered none of the natural obstacles which, both in 1881 and in the last few weeks, were supposed to have made the Boers so formidable an enemy in Natal. Here were no great mountain ranges or treacherous defiles, but a vast plain, with isolated kopjes studding its surface like islands on the open sea—an ideal country, as it seemed then, for the evolutions of regular troops. The greatest natural obstacle, the passage of the Orange River, was already in Methuen's hands, thanks to the forethought which had determined the retention of this

key of the whole strategical situation. Besides the Riet and Modder, small rivers meandering across the open plain, the only impediments to an advancing army might be found in certain patches of hilly ground where the kopjes were closer together and sufficiently linked up by intervening ridges to enable the Boers to take up a defensive position. Of these there were only three on the direct line between Orange River and Kimberley: at Belmont, at Rooilaagte (between Graspan and Enslin Stations), and between Magersfontein and Spytfontein, almost within reach of Kimberley. The last promised to be the most difficult, but none of them were so large that they could not be turned by a comparatively short detour on either side.

Methuen decides to march straight along the railway.

Lord Methuen's plan was to move, as far as possible, directly along the railway line, repairing it as he advanced. In the first place he would thus be able to manage with a smaller and less unwieldy field transport,* keeping in touch with his base, and receiving additional supplies and reinforcements whenever he might require them. In the second place, as his object and instructions were not merely to get to Kimberley with his force but to re-open communication between it and the outer world, and if possible remove the greater part of the non-combatant population, he was determined to fight the Boers on his way and to beat them so thoroughly that he need have no further anxiety about the safety of the railway. The defensive positions between Orange River and Kimberley seemed admirably adapted to his strategy. They were sufficiently strong to tempt the Boers to make an attempt to bar his path—in fact his information was that they were intrenching the Belmont and Rooilaagte heights for this very purpose—they were not so strong but that he might hope to drive the Boers out of them in utter rout. The most obvious lesson of the Natal campaign at that moment seemed to be that direct attacks like Talana and Elandslaagte, unflinchingly carried through,

* In fairness to the Transport Department it should be said that it was not so much the lack of available transport that determined Methuen's original plan—for he could have had more, at any rate in the shape of ox-transport—as the plan that determined the transport asked for.

offered better prospects of success than elaborate tactical manœuvres in face of so mobile an enemy. The spirit in which Methuen set forth is best shown in his answer to Colonel Willoughby Verner a few days later, when the latter suggested going round the Belmont position: "My good fellow, I intend to put the fear of God into these people." It was a right soldierly spirit, but there were two things that Methuen's strategy left out of account: the impossibility of reaping the fruits of victory against a mounted foe without an adequate force of cavalry, and the enormous strength given to defensive positions—positions of a kind undreamt of in all previous warfare—by the flat trajectory and deadly intensity of modern rifle-fire. Nor would it seem that Methuen —or indeed any other British general at that time—laid enough stress on the profound moral effect upon an enemy of mere out-manœuvring—of making the enemy conform to one's movements instead of conforming to his, of compelling him to choose between taking the offensive or hurriedly defending weak and unprepared positions.

Boer preparations to check the advance.

Pending Cronje's arrival from Mafeking, the task of checking, or at least delaying, Lord Methuen's advance was assigned to the Free State commandant, Jacob Prinsloo, to be supported, if necessary, by the Transvaal contingent under De la Rey, which was now on the south side of Kimberley. Prinsloo's headquarters and base of supply was Jacobsdal, a small farming centre on the north bank of the Riet River, about ten miles east of Modder River railway-bridge. Prinsloo now moved south and joined hands with Van der Merwe, who, since the skirmish of November 10, had been supposed to keep watch on the movements in Orange River Camp. The Boers unhesitatingly assumed that the British would advance straight along the railway-line, and made their preparations accordingly. Their plan was simply to hold successive positions along the railway and invite attack. If the first attack proved too strong, the force would fall back, after inflicting the maximum of damage and suffering the minimum of loss, on a new position and on the reinforcements coming up in rear. The heights at Belmont and Rooilaagte were strengthened with trenches and sangars,

while in addition to the base at Jacobsdal, permanent laagers were formed at Ramdam, a farm with abundant water supply north-east of Rooilaagte, and at Winkelhoek to the east of Belmont. The position of these bases of supply along a line parallel to, and within a few miles of, the route by which the British were expected, strikingly illustrates both the advantage conferred on the Boers by their mobility—for they could thus reckon upon holding their positions to the last moment, free from all anxiety as to the removal of supplies in face of a victorious enemy—and their confidence in the simplicity of their opponents' strategy.

Composition of Methuen's force. Lack of mounted men.

The force with which Lord Methuen started his march consisted of two brigades of infantry: the 1st or Guards Brigade, under Sir H. Colvile, consisting of the 3rd Grenadiers, the 1st and 2nd Coldstream * and 1st Scots Guards, and the 9th Brigade, under Major-General Fetherstonhaugh, consisting of the 1st Northumberland (5th) Fusiliers, the 2nd Northamptons, 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, and half the 1st Loyal North Lancashires †; the 9th Lancers, a handful of New South Wales Lancers, Rimington's Guides, and three companies of mounted infantry; the 18th and 75th Batteries, R.F.A.; 7th and 26th Companies, R.E. The Naval Brigade, composed of some 400 bluejackets and marines from the *Powerful*, *Doris* and *Monarch*, with four 12-pounders, under Captain Prothero, was expected on the 21st, and was to follow the column as soon as it arrived. The transport, though cut down to a minimum, still extended over some five miles of road when on the march. The chief defect of the force was the lack of mounted men. On the open veld, with its enormous distances, the few hundred troopers Methuen took with him were barely sufficient for reconnoitring and screening purposes; there was nothing left either for cavalry pursuit, for threatening the enemy's rear, or for rapidly seizing advanced positions. It was

* The 1st Coldstream arrived at Orange River after the force had started, and did not catch up their brigade till the evening of the 22nd.

† The North Lancashires did not join till the morning of Belmont, in which battle they did not take part though they were available. Two companies of Munster Fusiliers, however, contrived to get up as far as Belmont with the 9th Brigade.

not that Methuen, who had been in this same country with Warren in 1885, was himself insufficiently alive to the need of mounted troops. But he had to be contented with what he could get. One cannot help suspecting that, if Sir R. Buller had fully appreciated the value of cavalry, he would have diverted to Orange River some of the regiments now being sent up to French, and replaced them by some of Methuen's infantry battalions, or else have delayed Methuen's start till his force could be properly equipped.

Nov. 20–21. The start.

The early morning of November 21 was fixed for the start. On the 20th the troops that were to take part in the advance bivouacked on the northern bank of the river. The evening was clear and cold, and as soon as the sun set the whole stretch of the camping-ground was dotted with camp fires. To feed these, and to leave them burning high, in the somewhat futile hope of deceiving Boer spies as to the early start of the column, huge masses of mimosa thorn had been cut in the afternoon, and the blue acrid smoke and sharp aromatic smell of the burning wood drifted down and across the river, now at its lowest, a mere series of pools connected by a narrow channel of deep water, winding among sandbanks and black dykes of slabby rock. The men, delighted with the prospect of real war, and too excited to go to sleep, gathered in groups round the fires, and it was midnight before the last choruses died away. By 4 A.M. the whole of the troops were in motion, and the two brigades moved off by the side of the line. It would be hard to find better marching-ground than the high veld. The pure, invigorating air, and the absence of all obstacles, except an occasional wire fence, with the consequent width of front available, contributed alike to compactness of the column and to steady brisk progress. The men stepped out well, but Lord Methuen was unwilling to ask too much of men and horses freshly landed from a long sea journey, and at noon, after a ten-mile march, the force halted for the day at Fincham's Farm, a great centre of ostrich breeding, lying a mile west of Witteputs siding. Here was a patch of green trees, and a large "dam," or reservoir, of good water—this last an essential point in deter-

mining the length of a march in this arid region. Long before this the news of Methuen's advance had been flashed by heliograph to Prinsloo at Belmont and to De la Rey outside Kimberley. A few hours later the inhabitants of Johannesburg were reading of it in their evening paper.

Nov. 22. Troops in touch with the Boer artillery at Belmont.

On the afternoon of the 22nd another easy but hot march of ten miles brought the troops by sunset to Thomas's Farm, two miles south-west of Belmont railway-station. Here the reconnoitring cavalry came under fire from the Boer outposts, and from a gun on the western slopes of a prominent kopje, hence known as Gun Hill, south-east of Belmont station. The 18th Battery, coming up ahead of the force, replied. The chief result of this slight encounter was that Major Albrecht, commanding the Free State Artillery, withdrew his guns (2 Krupp and one or two 37m.m. "pom-poms") in rear of the Belmont kopjes during the night, and that the Boer artillery in consequence took practically no part in the next morning's action.

The Belmont position.

The position in which the Boers awaited Methuen's attack was a mass of hilly country to the east of Belmont station, rising to a height of 100–200 feet, and roughly triangular in its general outline, the point facing north and the base, some three miles wide, deeply indented by a bay of the veld, and seamed by a great forked donga running up into the centre of the position. In the western half of this bunch of kopjes two points rose most conspicuously and steeply from the veld, one a broad flat-topped hill to which the name of Table Mountain was given by the troops, and the other, Gun Hill, an irregularly-shaped crest a mile or more in length, forming the south-western corner of the complex. The eastern half, on which the generic name of Mont Blanc was bestowed, was an almost continuous mass of high ground, only broken by a nek about two-thirds of the way down. The total Free State force assembled here numbered some 1500–2000 men. The Kroonstad burghers, under Prinsloo's personal command, occupied the most advanced position on Gun Hill. The Fauresmith, Bloemfontein and Brandfort men were chiefly on Table Mountain, though a detachment under Van der Merwe was stationed

on some small kopjes west of the line, whence they ineffectively menaced the British flank at the beginning of the morning's battle. The Jacobsdalers under Lubbe were in reserve on Mont Blanc. The position was strong, according to the ideas that prevailed among the Boers till after their first few encounters with British troops. The sides of the kopjes rose steeply to the well-sangared crests, and the veld below, with its short leafless karroo brush and tufts of rank grass, offered no vestige of cover for an attacking party.

Methuen's plan. Unrealisable owing to faultiness of map.

Such was the position out of which Lord Methuen was determined to drive the Boers. His own knowledge of its configuration was derived partly from the utterly inadequate information—mainly confined to the position of farm boundaries—contained in the maps with which he had been supplied before starting, and partly from a map based on a sketch drawn by Colonel Verner during the afternoon's reconnaissance. It was inevitable that such a map should be of an impressionist character, and the fact that this map divided Gun Hill into a detached conical kopje, and a second hill, or rather piece of high ground, intervening between it and Mont Blanc,* was mainly responsible for the way in which a carefully planned action became a pure "soldiers' battle." Methuen's plan was to attack the western face of the position—*i.e.*, Table Mountain—with the 9th Brigade, while the Guards simultaneously seized the south-western salient, the Scots and Grenadiers rushing the north-western and southern slopes respectively of Gun Hill, and the Coldstream battalions, under cover of the fire from Gun Hill, following round to the left of the Scots and carrying the "high ground" beyond. To diminish the heavy cost involved in an advance across the bare veld to the foot of the kopjes, he determined to carry out this operation as a night attack, so timed that the troops should be safely established on the crest of the position just before daybreak. Once on the heights the 9th Brigade was, by

* It is essential, in reading Lord Methuen's despatch, to bear in mind that it refers to this imaginary configuration of the ground, and that it is further obscured, in its published form, by the common printer's error of putting "east" for "west," and *vice versâ*.

a wide flanking movement, to sweep round with its left, clearing Table Mountain, and then, under cover of the fire from the Guards, who were to act as pivot on the eastern edge of the "high ground," to carry the rear of the Boer position on Mont Blanc.

Nov. 23. Battle of Belmont. The night march.

Soon after 2 A.M. the troops moved out of camp in a north-easterly direction, the 9th Brigade advancing till they struck the railway, which they then followed for a short distance northwards, while the Guards, on their right, marched straight on their rendezvous at a ganger's hut supposed to be 800 yards south-east of the point of Gun Hill. Till the line was reached the oppressive stillness of the night was only broken by the soft crushing of the veld brush under the men's feet. But here, in order to get the ammunition mules and water-carts across, it became necessary to cut down the wire fences on both sides of the rails, with a consequent clanging of metal audible afar through the silent darkness. The Guards now deployed, the Scots and Grenadiers in the first line. The battalions were well extended, and Lord Methuen, with a clear insight into one of the chief features of modern warfare, had ordered the men to be deployed to at least five paces interval for the actual attack. The two leading battalions moved rapidly across the undulating plain towards the heights now dimly looming up against the north-western horizon. Haste was necessary, for the Brigade had arrived late at the ganger's hut (3.20 instead of 3 A.M.) and dawn was fast approaching. The 800 yards were quickly covered, a momentary delay being caused by a stony kopje which was at first taken for Gun Hill. But the real Gun Hill still seemed as distant as ever. By a mistake, only intelligible to those who know the extraordinary clearness of the South African atmosphere, the sketch-map had underestimated the distance by fully a thousand yards. It was a serious error, for not only did it cause the attack to be delivered by day instead of by night, with all the disadvantages thereby entailed, but it probably prevented a complete surprise of the Boers. In the growing grey of twilight the men pushed on. As they came nearer the features of Gun Hill became more and

more distinct. But instead of the detached conical kopje they expected, the Guards saw fronting them a steep and concave face, whose two horns, rising somewhat higher than the saddle between them, were nearly a thousand yards apart. The eastern horn really covered the site of the imaginary high ground, intended to be subsequently occupied by the Coldstreamers, but it was only natural, under the circumstances, that Colonel Eyre Crabbe, commanding the Grenadiers, should assume it to be the face of Gun Hill he had been ordered to attack and should lead his men upon it. The critical moment had now come, and every heart steeled itself in readiness for the expected burst of fire. The Scots were already within 350 yards of the buttress frowning before them. But not a shot was heard; no sign of life could be detected on the crest. Had the Boers after all evacuated the position in the night?

3.55 A.M. Outbreak of fire. Scots and Grenadiers carry Gun Hill.

Suddenly a shot rang out, and then "there ran along the crest of the kopje quick, vivid jets of fire like jewels flashing in a coronet . . . the rim of fire beads flashed along the crest and died away, and raced along the crest again as tiny gas-jets blow out and re-ignite in a heavy wind."* It was aimed fire, for the advancing line was already visible in the pale morning, and a few moments later the flash of the rifles could no longer be seen against the daylight brightening over the skyline. Welcoming the battle after the oppressive suspense of the night march, the Guards swept forward at a steady double, wave after wave of widely extended men, to win their way to the foot of the kopje where the very steepness of the slope offered a scanty zone of comparative safety. The Scots, who were nearest, reached their goal first, for a time encountering a severe enfilading fire from the south-eastern bastion, diverted a minute later by the rapid advance of the Grenadiers. Their casualties had not been few, but their extended order had saved the battalions from the destruction threatened by the storm of drumming bullets. A slight pause to recover breath and fix bayonets, and the two battalions, slightly overlapping in the centre, began the steep ascent. Climbing, sometimes

* From Mr. Julian Ralph's 'Towards Pretoria.'

on hands and knees, over and round the ironstone boulders heaped on the face of the steep incline, the Guards pushed their way upwards and onwards in face of a terrific magazine fire poured down upon them. The assault was unprepared by artillery, and the efforts of the companies in rear to keep up a rifle-fire on the crest were not sufficient to prevent the Boers leaning freely over their breastworks and picking off helmet after helmet as it rose to view on the slope beneath. But the resolution of the British soldier would not be denied. The whole affair was over within twenty-five minutes from the first shot. The Boers failed, recovered themselves for a moment, failed again, and ran, while the British line heaved itself on to the crest of the ridge, only to find the position deserted, and its front exposed to a long-range but converging fire from the farther edges of the plateau that extended before it and from Table Mountain on its left. The Kroonstad men had already picked up their mounts and were disappearing behind a spur of high ground to the right, leaving behind some thirty or forty dead and wounded dotted over the hill-top. The British loss had been heavy. Lieutenant Fryer, Adjutant of the Grenadier battalion, was killed while gallantly leading the assault; Major Dalrymple-Hamilton of the Scots seriously wounded. Two more casualties among the Grenadiers occurred at this point. Lieutenant Blundell was mortally wounded by a wounded Boer to whose assistance he was going, whether from deliberate treachery or in an unreasoning agony of pain and terror it is impossible to say. In similar fashion a Boer lying on the ground with a smashed knee shot Colonel Crabbe at close range through wrist and thigh, the command of the Grenadiers consequently devolving on Major D. A. Kinloch. The Scots meanwhile very nearly suffered loss at the hands of their own countrymen, for while Colonel Paget was reforming his men under the scanty cover of the boulders strewn about the crest, the right hand companies of the Northamptons, which had been extended to face to the south, suddenly poured two or three hot volleys into the Scots from the left, mistaking them for Boers. At 4.20, Colonel Hall, commanding the artillery, came up with the 18th Battery on the right rear of the Guards,

and shelled the farther ridges where the Boers were now swarming hurriedly to take up their second position. With the battery were also the naval guns under Captain Prothero, which the indefatigable sailors had all night through, with infinite struggles in dongas and sandy places, been bringing up from Witteputs.

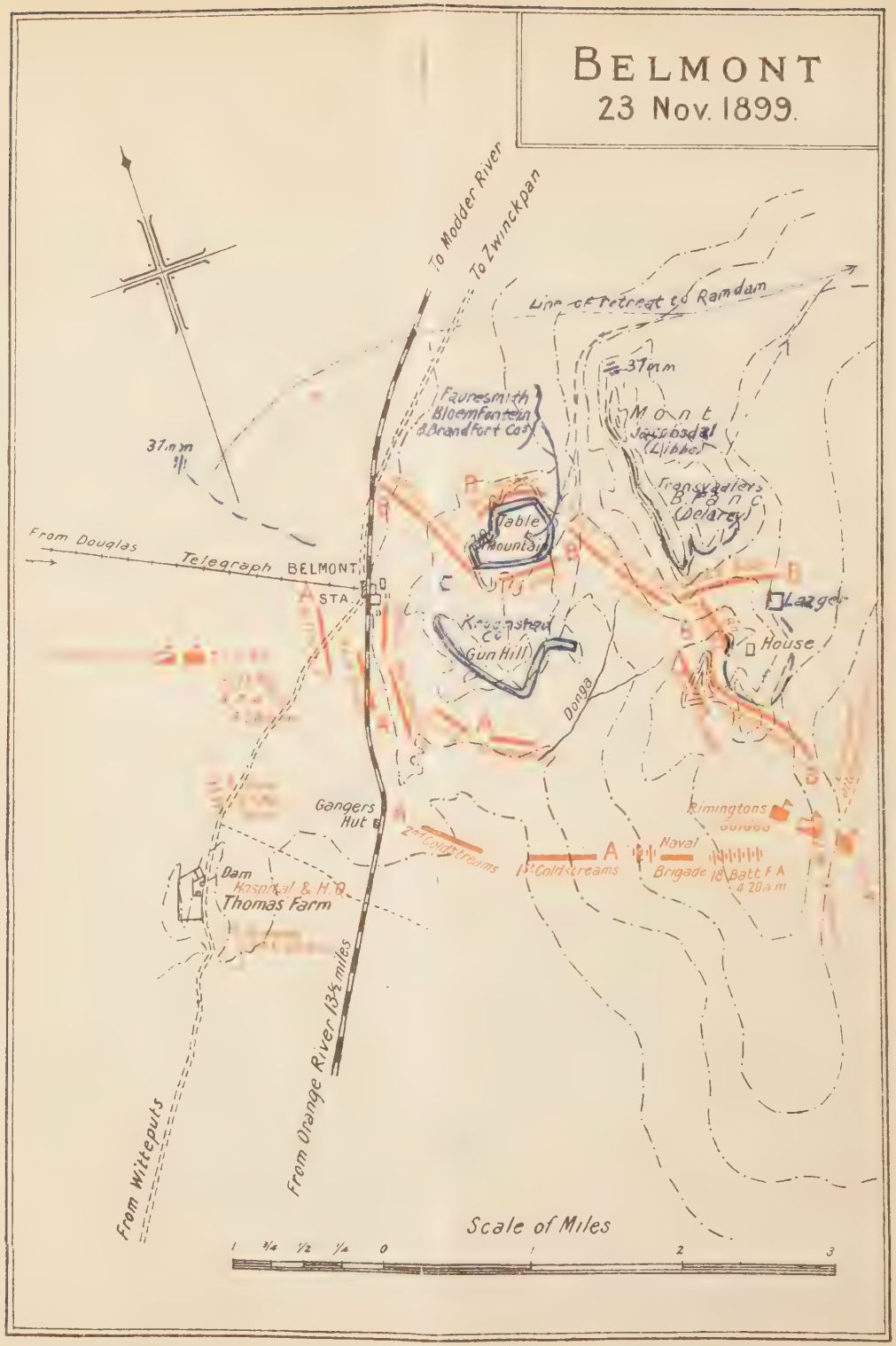
Ninth Brigade carry Table Mountain, but further advance checked.

Meanwhile on the left the 9th Brigade, which, like the Guards, did not reach its objective before dawn, recognised the signal for attack, and advanced on Table Mountain, the Northumberland Fusiliers on the left, the Northamptons on the right, and in the centre the Yorkshire Light Infantry and two companies of Munster Fusiliers,* originally intended to be in the second line. The Northumberlands were at first checked by a heavy fire from some sangars on the south-western face of Table Mountain, but the Yorkshires and Northamptons, moving across the bay between Table Mountain and Gun Hill, and seizing a spur of high ground projecting from the latter, successfully enfiladed these sangars, thus enabling the whole line to advance and, after slight resistance, to seize the crest of the hill. This was barely ten minutes after the Guards had reached the summit of Gun Hill. But a considerable pause now ensued in the action. In spite of the support of the 75th Battery, which had been ordered to move forward on the left, the fire kept up by the Boers from the broken ground on the far side of the plateau proved too strong to enable General Fetherstonhaugh to carry out the original plan of sweeping across to the northern end of Mont Blanc. A ridge on the south-east of Table Mountain, from which the most annoying fire came, was carried by the companies on the right, but the fire from Mont Blanc, as well as from a small party of the Boers who still clung to the northern edge of Table Mountain, checked a further advance. About this time General Fetherstonhaugh was wounded in the shoulder and passed over the command to Colonel Money, commanding the 5th Fusiliers.

5.30–7.30 A.M. Cold-streamers clear south end of Mont Blanc.

It was evident that the design of giving the 9th Brigade the lion's share of the day's work was not altogether favoured by the lie of the ground. A still further extension to the

* Erroneously marked in plan as L. N. Lancashires.



Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London.

right of the battle now occurred which effectually disposed of whatever still remained of the original scheme. When the position originally intended to be taken by the Coldstream battalions was attacked by the Grenadiers, Colonel Codrington, instead of going round to the left, moved the 1st Coldstream still further to the right, somewhat uncertain as to his objective. Coming under fire from the southern end of Mont Blanc at about 5.30, he brought up his left flank till he faced almost due south-east. Under cover of a heavy artillery fire at 1300 yards range the 1st Coldstream advanced diagonally on the southern extremity of Mont Blanc, and took it in brilliant style and with but slight loss, supported by half the 2nd Coldstream on their left, and by the Grenadiers, who came down from Gun Hill into the plain and across the donga, where they met with a searching long-range fire from the heights beyond. These heights were then cleared up to the nek. The obvious step now was to clear the centre of the position, between Table Mountain and the northern half of Mont Blanc, before storming this, the last stronghold of the Boer resistance. The Scots Guards were already moving across the Gun Hill plateau, and General Colvile reinforced them with the left half of the 2nd Coldstream, which he had kept back from taking part in Codrington's attack. At the same time Lord Methuen sent the Yorkshires and Munsters round to the right of Table Mountain. The Northumberlands now managed finally to drive the Boers off the northern edge of Table Mountain, to which they had held so tenaciously. One small party held out till the British were within fifty yards and then hoisted the white flag. The moment the British rose to accept the signal several of the Boers fired, seriously wounding Mr. E. F. Knight, the correspondent of the *Morning Post*. Meanwhile the mixed force of Scots, Coldstream and Yorkshires rapidly swept the Boers out of the centre of the position, and ended their day's work with the occupation of the Boer laager in rear of Mont Blanc. The Boers on the northern half of Mont Blanc, although now reinforced by some of the Transvaalers under De la Rey, who had come post-haste from Kimberley with 800 men, did not think it worth while to

Boers abandon position.

dispute the position any further, and after a few shells from the naval guns abandoned the heights. By 7.30 A.M. the day was won and the last of the retreating Boers were cantering away to Ramdam.

Weakness and exhaustion of cavalry prevents pursuit.

A cavalry brigade and a battery of Horse Artillery were wanted to make good the success, as Lord Methuen regretfully pointed out in his despatch. The artillery teams, fresh from the ships, were too done up for pursuit, and an attempt to get the naval guns on to a low kopje on the right proved unavailing. The mounted troops had been busy all day and every day before, and were neither fresh nor numerous enough to press home the pursuit. On the left they had little to do except to demonstrate against Van der Merwe's men, and prevent any attempt at an outflanking movement against the rear of the 9th Brigade. By the time Van der Merwe's men fell back, and the cavalry threaded their way through the kopjes, the main Boer force was well out of reach. On the right the cavalry and Rimington's moved right round till they could watch the Boer laager, from which direction they were shelled soon after dawn. But any attempt to pursue the retreating Boers, or capture their convoy, was effectually frustrated by parties of De la Rey's men who were detached to cover the retreat, and successfully ambushed the Lancers and Mounted Infantry at a point some four miles east of Mont Blanc. The British extricated themselves as well as they could, Major Milton showing conspicuous gallantry, but there was no more question of pursuit.

Discussion of battle.

Such was the battle of Belmont. Originally planned with some tactical skill, it became, through no special fault of anyone concerned, a soldiers' battle, the battalions going straight ahead at whatever height fronted them, and marching up hill and down dale till the last Boer had been driven from the furthermost kopjes. A soldiers' battle in the best sense of the word, it exemplified the lasting value, even under the most novel conditions, of discipline and *moral*. As Sir H. E. Colvile expresses it, "the men did for themselves what no general would have dared ask of them." In view of this the losses were not heavy. Four officers

and 71 men killed or died of wounds, 21 officers and 199 men wounded, was the total. Three officers and 33 men killed, and six officers and 95 men wounded, indicates the share of the Grenadiers in what was essentially a Guards' action.* The Boers, according to their official account, lost 12 killed and 40 wounded, but as the British burying-parties found over 30 dead, their total casualties probably amounted to 100. Besides these the British took some 40 prisoners, a few wagons, some ammunition, and a number of cattle. The moral effect produced on the Boers by the irresistible onset of the British was considerable. Prinsloo, who showed considerable lack of courage in action, described it to his Government as a "terrible fight to our disadvantage." But the mass of the Boers took their defeat more phlegmatically, consoling themselves with the thought of the enormous casualties they imagined they had inflicted, and made ready to repeat the operation at Rooilaagte, the next toll-gate on the road to Kimberley.

Nov. 24. Methuen decides to attack Boers at Rooilaagte. Bivouac at Swinkpan.

During the afternoon and most of the next day the troops rested at Thomas's Farm. In the morning the armoured train moved up the line towards Graspan with the mounted patrols, but was shelled from the kopjes north of the siding, where it reported the presence of 400 Boers with two guns. Lord Methuen at once determined to attack these and, if possible, capture them. Where he supposed the rest of the Boer force to have gone to is not quite clear, but he evidently considered he had only a small force to deal with, which one brigade and his mounted troops could easily envelope. For this purpose he decided to use the 9th Brigade, under Colonel Money, which had been less severely tried on the 23rd, keeping the Guards in reserve to march with the baggage

* The following were the casualties among officers:—Staff: wounded, Brig.-Gen. Fetherstonhaugh. 3rd Grenadier Guards: killed, Lieut. Fryer; wounded, Lieut.-Col. E. Crabbe, Lieuts. B. H. Blundell (died), Leslie (died), Vaughan, Rebow, Russell, Lygon and Cameron. 1st Coldstream Guards: wounded, Lieut. Grant. 2nd Coldstream Guards: wounded, Lieuts. Hon. C. Willoughby and Burton. 1st Scots Guards: wounded, Major Hon. N. Dalrymple-Hamilton; Lieuts. Bulkeley and Alexander. 1st Northumberland Fusiliers: killed, Capt. Eager and Lieut. Brine; wounded, Major Dashwood, Capt. Sapte, Lieuts. Festing and Fishbourne. 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment: wounded, Capt. Freeland and Lieut. Barton.

to Enslin siding, where, after defeating the Boers, he hoped to make his next bivouac. To give his troops a shorter march up to the Boer position, he marched that same afternoon to Swinkpan, leaving the Scots Guards and the two companies of Munster Fusiliers to guard Belmont Station in case of an attack from a Boer force of 500 men believed to be hovering about a few miles to the east. Skirting round the scene of the previous day's battle, the column marched north-eastwards for five or six miles till it reached the pan, a small "vlei" set in an oval ring of steep kopjes, one of those peculiar volcanic formations occurring in this part of Africa, of which the most famous are the clay-filled crater pipes that hold the diamonds of Kimberley. The pan had just been evacuated by the Boer outposts, and field-glasses, ammunition and preparations for supper were found lying about. At 3.30 on the morning of the 25th the attacking column moved out, the Guards, rejoined later by the Scots, and transport following some three hours later. The mounted troops were sent well out on the wings, the bulk of the 9th Lancers and mounted infantry, with Rimington's, to the east, on which side Methuen hoped to cut off the Boer retreat. The field batteries went on ahead, while the naval guns on trucks followed the armoured train up the line. The infantry was headed by the Naval Brigade, to whom Lord Methuen had decided to assign the post of honour in the forthcoming attack.

Boer position at Rooilaagte.

The position upon which the British were marching was a natural fortress of some strength. Its front, a range of low hills over two miles in length, sinking in the middle to mere reefs of piled-up boulders, and rising at its eastern end into a steep conical kopje fully 200 feet high, faced due south over the open plain. At each end the line of kopjes was drawn back sharply at a right angle, the eastern containing wall of the position stretching down towards Rooilaagte Farm, the western crossing the railway and gradually sinking away into the plain. North of Rooilaagte and east of Enslin siding was a smaller group of steep kopjes covering the left rear of the position. The chief feature of the position for defensive purposes was the ease and rapidity with which any portion of the rectangular rim of kopjes could be rein-

forced from any other along completely sheltered interior lines. Its weakest point was its western side along the railway. Here the Boers—not 400 men, but the bulk of the combined forces of Prinsloo and De la Rey, fully 2000 men, with five guns (including "pom-poms")—placed two guns and a considerable part of their force astride of the railway. The rest were distributed by De la Rey, who had practically taken over the command, along the rim of kopjes, the prominent eastern buttress being held by the Jacobsdal burghers under Commandant Lubbe. The Fauresmith burghers were left to guard the laager at Ramdam, but a detachment of them under Field-Cornet Venter moved out and hung on the right flank of the British all the morning.

Nov. 25. Battle of Enslin, Graspan or Rooilaagte. Preliminary movements.

At an early hour the cavalry on the right had been shelled as they tried to work round the eastern flank of the position. To give a wider berth to the shells they crossed to the east of the barbed wire fence which marked the Free State boundary. Here the Lancers suddenly came under a hot fire from some of Venter's men who had watched them from the top of an apparently isolated and untenanted ridge. Somewhat later, towards 7.30 A.M., Methuen, on receiving a report from Major Rimington that the Boers menacing the right flank were 500 strong, heliographed across to Colvile, whose brigade was now coming up in rear, to move across to the south-east to check any attempt from that flank. This Colvile did with the Grenadiers and 2nd Coldstream, and the Boers fell back without waiting for a shot to be fired. Meanwhile on the left Lieutenant Dean, R.N., had detrained two of the naval guns just before six o'clock, and had begun shelling the Boer position on the railway at 5000 yards range. A little later the 75th Field Battery came up on the right of the naval guns, which now advanced to 4000 and ultimately to within 2800 yards of the enemy's guns, which replied manfully to the intense fire directed upon them. The 18th Battery was at the same time engaged in pouring shrapnel over the eastern flank of the Boer position at a range of about 2500 yards. While the artillery duel was thus going on on both flanks the infantry steadily moved forward in widely deployed

lines. A description of this advance as seen by the cavalry on the wing * gives a striking picture of the opening phase of an attack across open country and under modern conditions:

"A wide plain in front of me, four miles across, flat as the sea, and all along the farther side a line of kopjes and hills rising like reefs and detached islands out of it. You might think the plain was empty at first glance, but if you look hard you will see it crawling with little khaki-clad figures dotted all over it; not packed anywhere, but sprinkled all over the surface. Meantime, from three or four spots along the sides of those hills, locks and puffs of white smoke float out, followed at long intervals by deep, sonorous reports; and if you look to the left, where our naval guns are at work, you will see the Boer shells bursting close to or even over them. The artillery duet goes on between the two, while still the infantry, unmolested as yet, crawls and crawls towards those hills."

Methuen decides to concentrate attack on Boer left.

It was not till the Naval Brigade, now extended in a single long line at four paces interval, was within 3500 yards of the centre of the Boer position, that Methuen showed his hand. While the 5th Fusiliers and Northamptons were allowed to continue advancing slowly against the front of the position, the Naval Brigade, supported by the Yorkshire Light Infantry and two companies of North Lancashires, was ordered to move diagonally to the right upon the commanding kopje which marked the eastern corner of the rectangle, and which he had selected as the key of the position and the object of his principal attack. The 18th Battery, which had been shelling the kopje for the last two hours, now redoubled its fire, while towards eight o'clock, when the infantry were closing in for the assault, Methuen ordered the 75th to come round and reinforce the hail of shrapnel now being concentrated on the crest. He at the same time ordered the two naval guns to withdraw to a safer range. But Dean, with the true fighting spirit of the sailor, thought it safer to remain and continue the duel than to attempt to remove his guns under the accurate and effective shrapnel fire that the Boer guns at

* L. March Phillipps' 'With Rimington.'

once began to pour upon them. So brisk a fire did he maintain that though his guns were absolutely exposed on the plain, while those of the enemy were skilfully concealed among the kopjes, he successfully held his own till the end of the engagement.

8.30–9.30 A.M. Naval Brigade's attack.

Methuen's plan for concentrating his attack upon the Boer left showed considerable skill, and mobile as was the enemy that now looked down from the crests of the hills upon his slow manœuvring infantry, it achieved some measure of success. Long before the infantry were ready for the attack large parties of Boers had, it is true, galloped round unseen to take up points of vantage along the boulder-strewn lower ridges nearer the centre of the position, whence they could enfilade the attack without themselves attracting the fire of the guns; but very few of them actually reinforced Lubbe at the menaced salient. The British first line was now barely 600 yards from the kopje, and as the Boers poured a searching fire into it, wheeled up its right and prepared for the attack. On the right was a company of bluejackets, 55 strong, on the left were 190 marines, and to the left of these a company of North Lancashires*—330 men in all, covering, the Naval Brigade at four and the Lancashires at eight paces interval, a front of nearly a mile. In support, but still working on round to the right, was the main body of the Yorkshires. And now the attack began—an attack that will live to all time as one of the most splendid instances of disciplined courage. Captain Prothero and his officers led the way and the men followed, rushing forward 50 or 60 yards, lying down to fire, and then rushing forward again. Behind the gunners furiously plied the heights with shrapnel; on the right the Yorkshires poured volley after volley on to the crest, while away on the left the rest of the brigade advanced against the low ridges which enfiladed the attack. But nothing availed to keep down the fierce hurricane of fire that swept the open plain which the firing-line had to cross—a continuous stream of plunging short-range fire from in front, and a far more deadly cross-fire from the left. One after another the officers

* Marked K.O.Y.L.I. in plan.

fell. Captain Prothero was among the first to fall down wounded. Commander Ethelston, Major Plumbe, Captain Senior were killed. Midshipman Huddart was twice wounded, but continued leading till struck by a third fatal bullet. Nearly all the petty officers and non-commissioned officers were killed or wounded. Nearly half the line were down before they reached the foot of the kopje. Here in the dead ground the survivors flung themselves down to recover breath, moisten their parched and choking throats with the muddy contents of their water-bottles, and fix bayonets for the last charge. A moment later the North Lancashires, to whom the Boers had paid less attention, and the Yorkshires, whose companies admirably covered each other's advance with rifle-fire as they crossed the fire-swept zone in loosest of open order, joined on the left and right of the line, and together the representatives of the two services hauled themselves up the steep face in the teeth of a still heavy fire. It was not till the British were within 25 yards of the top that the Boers, first in ones and twos and then in a final rush, abandoned the sangars to which they had so tenaciously clung and fled across the broken ground in rear. Led by Captain Marchant, Lieutenant W. T. C. Jones —who had dragged himself thus far in spite of a severe wound in the hip—and Lieutenant Saunders of the Marines, and by the officers of the other leading companies, the British topped the crest, only to take cover at once on being welcomed by a fire from various spurs, ridges, and cross-walls, from behind which the Boers were covering their retreat. But the rest of the infantry on the left were now over the kopjes too, and by 9.30 or 10 A.M. the whole position was cleared. The Boer wagons were already well on their way, some to Ramdam, some to Jacobsdal and Modder River, and the burghers now leaped on their ponies and galloped off to rejoin them.

Causes of the heavy losses of Naval Brigade.

The losses of the Naval Brigade had been terribly severe. The marines lost two officers and nine men killed, and one officer and 72 men wounded, or a loss of 44 per cent. Routed or ambushed troops have suffered heavier losses, but rarely in military history have soldiers unwaveringly

fought their way through such a fiery ordeal and then successfully led the assault on an almost precipitous position. It has often been said that the marines marched to the attack in close order, upright, and indifferent to taking cover, and that this was the chief cause of their heavy casualties. But this was hardly the case. Undoubtedly the original extension to four paces was less than would now be adopted over open ground, and it would seem, too, that the men, each taking his direction by the summit of the kopje rather than by his neighbour, tended to converge as they advanced. The hardihood of the officers in wearing their swords and polished "Sam Browne" belts may also have contributed to their very heavy proportion of loss. But the real cause of the losses was the intense and accurate front and cross-fire converging upon the coverless stretch of open that had to be crossed to get to the foot of the position. How deadly that fire was is shown by the fact that many of the wounded lying dotted over the ground were hit again and again. The Yorkshires, a battalion that had learned every artifice of hill-fighting in the Tirah, were, no doubt, largely protected by their open order. But they did not bear the brunt of the attack, and were too far round to the right to receive the enfilading fire. The fact is that the losses at Enslin were due, not to any mistake, but simply to the unflinching and self-sacrificing heroism of the troops that led the assault, a heroism that probably saved the heavier casualties of a protracted attack.

Cavalry again unable to make good the pursuit.

The cavalry, weak in numbers, and with worn-out horses, could do little to turn the retreat to greater advantage. Though beaten, the Boers were by no means routed, and covered their retreat with skill and courage. On the left, indeed, the 9th Lancers, who were approaching Honeynest Kloof, were exposed to considerable danger. A large body of Boers, who were retreating to the east of them, suddenly turned inwards and made a spirited, and at that stage of the war most unusual, attempt to ride down the Lancers in the open, an attempt only frustrated by the coolness and gallantry of the mounted infantry and New South Wales Lancers, who occupied a fold in the ground on the line of retreat, and

poured a heavy fire into the advancing Boers. The attempted pursuit on the east was not more successful. The cavalry were well round upon the main line of the Boer retreat, but they were not strong enough to do anything effective. A donga in which a covering party of Boers had skilfully concealed themselves, and the sustained fire of a gun from the ridges north of Rooilaagte farm, held them back, while a bold charge on their right by a handful of Venter's men still further disconcerted them. Failing a cavalry pursuit, the only means of harassing the Boer retreat lay in the use of the guns, and a long-range fire was directed against the flying horsemen until they turned a protecting spur of the northern heights. Once again Methuen had cause to regret the absence of a cavalry brigade. Whether the mounted troops present could have done more is doubtful, but Lord Methuen was not satisfied with the leading of Colonel Gough, commanding the 9th Lancers, and that officer was succeeded in the command by Major Little.

Casualties.

The total British casualties at Enslin were 3 officers and 14 men killed, and 6 officers and 162 men wounded, the Naval Brigade suffering most, and the Yorkshire Light Infantry and North Lancashires next.* Of the Boer casualties it is only certain that 21 were buried by the British force, and that at least 40 were seriously wounded and abandoned in the hospital at Rooilaagte.

Dejection among Boers at Jacobsdal.

After securing a few prisoners and abandoned wagons the column moved on to Enslin siding, where a day's halt was made to replenish ammunition, the troops suffering much discomfort owing to the insufficiency of the water supply. Meanwhile the Boer leaders met together at Jacobsdal to deliberate on their next move. In a sense, both at Belmont and Enslin, the Boers had succeeded in carrying out their intended strategy of delaying and reducing the strength of the advancing column. But the ease with which the British had dislodged them from their positions, and the unexpected

* The following casualties occurred in the officer ranks:—Naval Brigade: killed, Commander Ethelston, Major Plumbe, Captain Senior, and Midshipman Huddart. Wounded, Flag-Captain Prothero and Lieut. Jones. 2nd Yorkshire L.I.: wounded, Captain Yate and Lieuts. Ferny-hough and Ackroyd.

DIRECTIONS

British Infantry

British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry

Boers

Artillery

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heaviness of their own casualties, had exercised a profound moral effect. The feeling in the laagers was one of dejection, especially among the Free Staters, to whom the weakness and irresolution of their leader, Prinsloo, had not been slow in communicating itself.

Description of General J. H. De la Rey.

Only one man rose superior to the general faint-heartedness, saw the cause of the Boer defeats in their true light, and at the same time, with a true general's insight, knew where to seek the remedy. General De la Rey's name has already been mentioned more than once, and will recur so frequently in the course of this history that it may be as well to give some description of the man who, next to Louis Botha, deserves to rank highest among the Boer leaders. Jacob, or "Koos" De la Rey, member of the First Volksraad for Lichtenburg, was already well over fifty years of age when the war broke out. Dark, with shaggy eyebrows, great aquiline nose—mark of old aristocratic Huguenot or Spanish blood—deeply lined face, and a vast bushy beard fast turning grey, he would have made a striking model for some warrior prophet of the Old Testament. Like Botha, De la Rey had been a progressive in politics, and had disapproved of Kruger's policy. But once war was declared there was no one more eager for prompt action, and no one, at a later date, set his face more sternly against the suggestion of surrender. Impulsive and passionate, he was often in the first months of the war to chafe against the stolid opposition of Cronje, whose popular reputation and political influence had won him the supreme control of the Transvaal forces in the west, and it was not till the Boer forces had been irretrievably weakened and the opportunities for successful strategy on a large scale lost, that he was to hold a really independent command. The terror of weak-kneed and timid burghers, an unyielding but chivalrous enemy, De la Rey was a born fighting soldier, Botha's strong sword-hand during the long closing struggle of the war. To compare small with great, he was the Stonewall Jackson, as Botha was the Lee of the Boer armies.

Realising value of horizontal

De la Rey had seen enough of both Belmont and Enslin to divine that it was not so much lack of courage as lack of

fire, De la Rey urges Boers to hold Modder River.

judgment in the choice of positions which had hitherto led to defeat. Under the new conditions of war these steep kopjes, on which the Boers had hitherto placed their reliance, so far from being impregnable, actually invited defeat. Their crests formed an admirable artillery target. The steep slopes themselves offered cover to an attacking force that once reached their base. A position on the level would give better concealment and a far more effective field of fire for the flat trajectory of modern rifles. Such a position, directly across the line of Methuen's march, De la Rey had already mentally selected in the deep trough formed by the Riet in its course across the level, featureless plain on both sides of Modder River Bridge, so called from the river which flows into the Riet just above it. On his urgent representations, and in view of the hourly expected arrival of Cronje's main force, the Free Staters consented to make another stand at the bridge. But there were many malingerers, and even the 1000 men or so who went had but a poor stomach for fighting, as the forthcoming battle was to show. All day long on Sunday, the 26th, the Boer commandos concentrated at Modder River Station, small reinforcements from Kimberley joining them there. Sunday afternoon and Monday they spent in intrenching, building gun emplacements, and marking off the ranges along the expected line of the British advance with biscuit tins and whitened stones. On Monday evening they were joined by Cronje, who had reached Edenburg by train on the 25th and had pushed on rapidly with about 1200 men of the Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom commandos, under his brother, Andries Cronje, and with two Krupps and three "pom-poms" under Adjutant Van de Venter. The total force on the 28th amounted to, perhaps, 3500 men, with six Krupps and three or four "pom-poms," roughly half the strength of Methuen's column.

The bed of the Riet. Peculiar course of Riet and Modder above their junction.

It is essential to bear in mind that De la Rey's plan was not to dispute the passage of the river in the ordinary sense, by holding commanding points from which a heavy fire could be brought to bear on troops attempting to cross, but to utilise the bed of the river itself as a defensive

position. For this purpose the Riet at Modder River Bridge was admirably suited. Like most South African rivers, especially those that traverse the soft soil of the Free State, the Riet flowed some thirty feet below the level of the surrounding plain in a deep cutting or trough—an exaggerated donga or a dwarf cañon. On either side a sloping space, varying from twenty to two hundred yards and more in width, rose from the water's edge till it was met by the sharply-cut line of severance from the veld in miniature cliffs six to ten feet high. These lower banks were covered thickly with willows and mimosas, whose tops, even at a small distance, were only visible as a line of bushes emerging from the flatness of the prairie. Of the river itself, no sight was to be gained until one was immediately upon it and could actually look over the edge of the veld behind which it ran concealed. Below the bridge for some two miles westwards, down to the dam at Rosmead village, the Riet was at that season a river comparable in width and depth to the upper Thames. Above the bridge for a quarter of a mile, up to its confluence with the Modder, it spread out, broad and shallow, over a wide bed of rock, forming a typical South African "drift." On the tongue of land between the two rivers stood the "Island Hotel," in a pleasure garden shaded with lofty trees, an oasis of verdure in the arid veld, and a favourite picnicking resort for the inhabitants of Kimberley. For two miles above the junction the line of the Riet lay roughly east and west, then bent sharply to the south for two miles more to Bosman's Drift, the first easily fordable spot, and then south-east towards Jacobsdal. The Modder, the smaller and shallower river of the two, turned off sharply to the north, then east, then south, till—but for another sudden turn to the east—it nearly joined the Riet again, to form an almost completely river-girt quadrilateral, known to the Boers as the "Twee Rivier." The peculiar course of the two rivers above their junction was destined to have an important bearing on the forthcoming battle. On both sides of the two rivers a bare sandy plain, covered thinly with veld brush a few inches in height, sloped almost imperceptibly up from the edge of their troughs, the southern bank of the

Riet to the east of the railway being habitually used, for its flatness, as a racecourse.

The underground fortress in the river bed.

The whole position was one enormous natural shelter trench—a ready-made underground fortress. The southern lip of the trough provided almost perfect cover for the firing-line, while it would be difficult to imagine a better field of fire than the plain in front. All that the Boers had to do was individually to bank up or excavate the edges here and there to provide a more comfortable firing position, and to trim the bushes just sufficiently to get a clear view of the field and yet remain concealed. A few made shooting-perches in the tree-tops, from which they secured an even better view of the plain. The lower banks behind the firing-line offered plenty of room for their ponies and for safe inter-communication, while the prospect, unlikely, but not impossible, of a hurried retreat across the river was made less unpleasant by the thought that the British artillery were not likely to concentrate an effective fire on drifts they could not see. The guns, however, could not well be posted south of the river, and separate emplacements were constructed for these under Albrecht's supervision, those for the field artillery being at some distance back from the river, while the "pom-poms" were brought quite close to the north bank, and gaps felled through the screen of trees to give them a full view of the glacis to the south. The actual detailed dispositions made by De la Rey, with which Cronje did not attempt to interfere, were as follows. To Prinsloo and the Free Staters was assigned the right wing from the bridge westward to the dam at Rosmead, where some broken ground and a farm-house and kraal on the south bank formed a convenient termination for the flank. The centre, on both sides of the railway, was held by De la Rey himself, with his Lichtenburgers and some picked men of the Potchefstroom commando. Here trenches were pushed forward in front of some buildings near the drift. Further east the newly-arrived Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom commandos, under Andries Cronje, held the southern, and to some extent the northern, banks of the Riet up to the point where its sudden bend to the south completely covered that flank. Albrecht's

guns were on the sandy plain west of the line. Van de Venter's two Krupps were at first in the "Twee Rivier," near the Island Hotel, with the "pom-poms" east of them commanding the expected advance of the British column. The chief weakness of the position was that both its flanks were entirely in the air and could easily be turned. But the Boers had little anxiety on that score. Nothing, indeed, could be more surprising than the serene confidence with which the Boers expected Methuen to march straight along the line upon the bridge—unless it be Methuen's almost unerring gravitation into the trap prepared for him.

Nov. 27. Cavalry report Boer concentration. Methuen decides to march by Jacobsdal.

Early on the 27th the British column left Enslin and after a 14-mile march camped at Klokfontein and Witkoplaagte, barely six miles from the river. The cavalry, extended over a front of seven or eight miles, patrolled ahead to within two or three miles of Modder River. Here they were fired at and two of Rimington's men were wounded. But they had gained as much information as cavalry can be expected to gain in open country. They reported that the Boers were concentrating on Modder River Bridge from every direction, but principally from Jacobsdal, where an uninterrupted stream of horsemen and wheeled conveyances could be seen moving westwards along the Riet. Later in the day Lord Methuen himself, with two of his staff, went out reconnoitring from Witkoplaagte further to the east and saw nothing but the low lines of dark green foliage masking the course of the rivers, the open rolling plain, and the blue hills of Magersfontein and Spytfontein beyond—the hills where he hoped to fight his last engagement on the road to Kimberley. Messages sent out from Kimberley indicated that it was at Spytfontein that the Boers intended to make their next stand, and this view was confirmed by other information which reached his field intelligence. So strong was this impression in Lord Methuen's mind that he preferred to interpret the reports of his cavalry as merely showing that a number of Boers were trekking to Spytfontein by way of the drift at Modder River. On this assumption he made his plan for the next march. This was to leave the Northamptons, Naval Brigade, Engineers,

and three guns intrenched at railhead, and then take his force with five days' rations *via* Jacobsdal and across the Modder to Abon's Dam, in the open country east of Spytfontein, a total distance of about 30 miles. From Abon's Dam he would take the Boer position in flank, and the successful conclusion of his attack would leave him practically in touch with Kimberley.

Nov. 28. Methuen changes his mind. His lack of information.

But before daylight on the 28th a native brought the information that the bridge was strongly held, thus confirming the report of the cavalry. The prospect of marching to Jacobsdal leaving a watchful enemy on his flank to attack his communications alarmed Lord Methuen, and he decided before proceeding any further to establish himself at Modder River, and gave orders for the force to march there at once. The soundness of the decision is open to doubt. If the Boers really were in force at the bridge, it was obvious that they expected him to march there and intended to dispute his passage. If so the march to Jacobsdal would surprise them, and by cutting them off from their base would create a state of alarm in which they were not likely to undertake active operations against his communications. If they were not in force the troops left at railhead could be trusted to look after themselves. These are general grounds, but there was a still stronger reason of which Methuen was entirely unaware. By a prompt flank march Methuen could, if he had only known it, have fallen upon the rest of Cronje's force with its long convoy slowly trekking up from Fauresmith. Nothing can be more typical of the ignorance under which Methuen laboured than the unperceived and unmolested passage of Cronje's army across his flank and front, separated by less than ten miles of open country. Possibly the cavalry ought to have discovered more on this flank. But ordinary cavalry are only of limited use in securing information. A few highly-trained scouts—men capable of moving singly for several days at a time—might, at this moment, have made all the difference to Methuen's operations. But such men are not improvised in a moment, and the parcimony or lack of imagination of the War Office was now paid for by the loss of precious opportunities. And

not in the matter of scouts only, for Methuen was hardly less ignorant of the conformation of the country through which he was moving than of the movements of his enemy. The only detailed map of Modder River which the Intelligence at Cape Town had supplied him with was a hasty sketch once made by an intelligence officer to accompany a scheme for defending the bridge with one company of infantry. Accurate and extensive enough for its purpose—it did not even reach to the first bends of the two rivers—it only served to mislead Methuen's staff, who drew from it inferences which were soon to be disproved by the facts. But badly though Methuen was treated in the matter of information it still remains a matter for surprise that he did not attempt to do more on the 27th to discover the exact course of the river, and to explore the country between Modder River and Jacobsdal.

4–7 A.M. March to Modder River.

It was soon after four when the infantry were turned out and ordered to march straight to Modder River Bridge. The position was to be carried by an enveloping attack by both brigades. The 9th Brigade, now commanded by Major-General Pole-Carew, and reinforced on the previous evening by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, moved off about 4.45 on the left, the Guards, on the right, starting half-an-hour later. The cavalry had already gone ahead, and their advanced patrols had drawn a heavy fire from the Boers near the bridge at 1500 yards range. Once more they reported the river strongly held. Whether the message reached Lord Methuen in time, or whether he disregarded it on the strength of his own observation, is not quite clear. The sun was already well up when the long lines of the infantry breasted the last fold of veld south of the river and altered direction slightly to the left as soon as the exact position of the bridge was made out. Nothing could have been more peaceful than the view across the wide flat plain scored with long lines of dark bushes, broken here and there by a few groups of taller poplars, the white walls of a farm building, or a kraal nestling in the cool green foliage that the column had not seen since leaving Witteputs. Half a mile north of the bridge, of which the broken spans could clearly be seen, a line of eucalyptus trees

marked the station and one or two houses that lay near. Of the three thousand grim, stubborn riflemen hidden in that nearest band of green not a trace revealed itself. So close indeed were the Boers now lying that even from the centre of their own position not a man was visible except the few attached to the guns.

7 A.M. Cronje moves two guns east. British guns open fire.

A little later, about 7 A.M., the first signs of the enemy were discovered on the right. Cronje, breakfasting with his staff at the Island Hotel, had watched the British advance. Fearing, from the original direction of the column, that the British intended crossing the Riet at Bosman's Drift and thus outflanking his left, he hurriedly withdrew a Krupp and a "pom-pom" from the Island Hotel to the east. Just as Cronje and the gunners were crossing a large donga which runs north-east from the bend of the Riet they were marked down by the 18th Battery, which at once galloped forward towards Bosman's Drift and at 4000 yards range burst several shells right over the little party. Cronje quickly brought his guns into action on the open veld south of the Jacobsdal road. He was assisted by a small body of men who had been holding a white farmhouse further east, and now advanced and set up a sputtering long-range fire which only seemed to emphasize the stillness of the rest of the landscape. Both the British batteries and the bulk of the cavalry were now concentrated on the right flank. The fire of the former soon proved so effective that Cronje withdrew his guns about 1000 yards to some rising ground behind the white house.

Methuen's astonishing conclusions as to Boer force and course of rivers.

This preliminary skirmish had a most important effect on what followed. Rejecting all other evidence for that furnished by his own eyes, Methuen at once jumped to the conclusion that the handful of men with Cronje composed the whole of the Boer force which had been reported to him as holding the river in great strength, and assumed that these were now retiring on Jacobsdal after fulfilling their object of covering the general Boer retreat on Spytfontein. Another assumption, hardly intelligible except to those who have actually seen the ground, was equally momentous in its consequences. So far from wishing to outflank the Boers by crossing the Riet at Bosman's Drift, as Cronje imagined,

Methuen, though almost on its banks, was, as it seems, quite unconscious of being near any river whatever, and imagined that the course of the Modder above the great "Twee Rivier" loop, where its south bank was lined with a row of tall poplars, was the continuation of the Riet directly in front of him. In other words he thought that the Riet ran due east and west for five or six miles above the bridge, and that a small Boer force was retiring before him across the plain on the south bank of this imaginary composite river. In this belief he made his dispositions. The Guards were to advance to the attack in widely extended order, and drive away, or, if possible, envelope the retiring Boer force. For this purpose the Scots on the right of the brigade were to swing their right well out, while the cavalry were to operate beyond them on the flank. The Grenadiers and 2nd Coldstream prolonged the line to the left, eventually extending up to and even across the railway,* while the 1st Coldstream were held in reserve. The centre of the brigade was to direct its advance on the line of poplars supposed to be on the Riet River. On the left of the Guards the 9th Brigade were similarly extended. The 5th Fusiliers, Yorkshires, and North Lancashires were in the firing-line, the Highlanders in reserve, and the Northamptons in rear guarding the transport, while Rimington's Guides patrolled the left flank. The whole line was intended to cover a front of five or six miles, to cross the river, which Methuen believed to be fordable at most points, wherever it struck it, and when all was clear to collect at Modder River Station for breakfast. The 9th Brigade was extended purely as a precaution—a fortunate precaution indeed—in case of snipers, but resistance, if any, was only expected on the right. The cavalry indeed knew, but they had sent in their report and could only assume that Methuen was acting with full knowledge. How little Methuen knew is shown by his action at this moment (8 A.M.). Turning to his aides-de-camp, he pointed out one of the distant white houses round the station as the one he selected for his own headquarters. Two of them at once cantered

* The first position marked on the map is not quite correct. The hours given on the map are also mostly earlier than those assumed in the text.

ahead to make arrangements, and were in the act of passing through the Guards, now, on their right, within 1200 yards of the river, when suddenly the whole line was met by a terrific continuous volley from four miles of apparently untenanted river bed.

8.10 A.M. The surprise. Colvile's description.

Sir H. E. Colvile has well described the completeness of the surprise:

"At eight o'clock I found Lord Methuen and his Staff looking at a clump of trees some 1500 yards to our front, which he said was on the Modder River. It had been reported that this was held by the enemy, but he thought they had gone. He, however, ordered me to extend for the attack. . . . After all our tough work on the kopjes . . . it seemed as if we should make short work of the enemy over this nice level ground . . . I think that every man felt that if the Boers perched on the top of kopjes were no match for him, they simply had not a chance on the flat. . . . 'They'll never stand against us here,' was said more than once in my hearing. . . . As we watched Arthur Paget and his Scots Guards moving ahead to the right, Lord Methuen said to me, 'They are not here.' 'They are sitting uncommonly tight if they are, sir,' I answered; and, as if they had heard him, the Boers answered too with a roar of musketry."

The whole British force had walked straight into the ambush so skilfully laid for it. Had but the Boers possessed the nerve to hold their fire a few minutes longer, the result would have been sheer massacre. Even as it was, in spite of the distance and the extended order, the casualties of those first few minutes were heavy enough. For a mile or more from the river the air was full of bullets flying horizontally "in solid streaks like telegraph wires." The men could do nothing but throw themselves down on their faces behind scattered ant-hills or the low leafless scrub, just high enough to conceal a man from an enemy whose eye was almost on the level of the veld, and attempt to reply to the deadly, invisible fire proceeding from the dark green belt before them. The left of the 9th Brigade was somewhat protected from the first burst of fire by a slight fold of ground. But the battalions in the centre, Northumberlands, 2nd Coldstream and Grenadiers, who attempted to move forward

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL LORD METHUEN, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G.,
COMMANDING 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION.

Photo by Window & Grove.

across the unbroken level of the racecourse, were severely punished. Colonel Stopford, of the 2nd Coldstream, was killed by one of the first shells fired as he tried to lead his men forward. On the right a single well-directed string of shells from one of the "pom-poms" annihilated the entire crew of the Scots Guards' Maxim, which was left alone all day, the one object visible above the plain to the crawling men.

8.30-12 M. Guards checked by Riet. Codrington' attempt to cross. After ineffectual frontal attack Guards become containing line.

And now a new surprise awaited the force. No sooner had the Scots Guards begun to move out to the right to outflank the Boer line, than they found themselves brought up against the Riet, running between steep, thickly-wooded banks—wide, muddy, and, as all attempts seemed to show, unfordable. The banks here were not held by the enemy, though they were searched from the northern cliffs of the bend and from scattered sharpshooters on the open ground to the east, and under cover of the trees most of the Scots managed to creep forward and reform behind a disused reservoir close to the river. The best chance of success on the right, had anyone known the ground, now lay in withdrawing the greater part of the Guards and using them to cross at Bosman's Drift, a mile higher up, thus outflanking the Boer position on the "Twee Rivier" and eventually the bridge itself. But though a plainly-marked track indicated the presence of a drift, and though the mounted troops had been skirmishing quite close to the drift for some time, its existence was not realised either by Methuen or by Colvile. Unwilling to fall back himself, Colvile sent to Colonel Codrington, commanding the 1st Coldstream, in reserve, to try to find a ford higher up stream. Codrington went a little way up stream, and very pluckily made his way across the river with a handful of men, partly by wading chin deep along a ledge of rocky bottom and partly by swimming. But several of the men were nearly drowned, and it was evident that there was no question of getting troops across at this point. Hearing this, Colvile ordered the attempt to be given up, and made no further effort to discover a means of getting across or of extricating himself from his cramped position. On the contrary, a determined attempt was now made to

advance directly on the Boer trenches. Along the front the 2nd Coldstream and Grenadiers advanced by short rushes to within about 1000 yards of the Boer trenches. On the right Captain Lowther, of the Scots, had gathered a hundred men together and advanced along the river in the hope of enfilading the Boer trenches. And now General Colvile and Colonel Paget, with a further reinforcement of the Scots and the greater part of the 1st Coldstream, supported this movement and pushed up towards the bend. But the force soon found itself exposed to a fire from its right flank as well as from its front, and when the Boer guns on the right discovered it and began to shell it freely, the attempt was abandoned. The fight now became perfectly stationary on the right, and the Guards, from this time forward, acted purely as a containing force. It was impossible to advance, but the men, unwilling to retreat, tenaciously held their ground for the rest of the day. Prostrate on the burning sand, with a fierce, blinding sun beating down upon their backs, lying upon their rifles to keep them cool enough to handle when required, hungry and thirsty, the men that day went through an ordeal that tried their stubborn quality to the utmost. Many, overcome by heat and exhaustion, fell asleep. There was no human interest; not a glimpse of a Boer or even a puff of smoke. Only a dark-green line of bushes, and the certainty that to raise one's head or one's arm was to provoke an instant volley of bullets. It was with the greatest difficulty and danger that ammunition and stretcher-bearers could crawl up to the firing-line. Now and again the action died away, partly because the Boers were unable to get the range.*

Movements of cavalry.

The cavalry, who were to have swept round the right flank of the Guards, were equally held up by the Riet. They were not strong enough to force a passage at Bosman's Drift unaided, even if they had thought of it. As it was they contented themselves with acting as a flank-guard. They

* A curious thing occurred soon after noon. A small herd of black and white goats moved across the fire zone between the two armies about a couple of hundred yards from the British line. The Boers instantly used them as a means of obtaining the range, and the danger of the least movement was greatly increased from that time.

were freely shelled by Cronje's guns, and sniped at by Boer skirmishers across the river, whose numbers grew steadily during the day as fresh detachments of Cronje's force arrived from Jacobsdal. At one time during the morning the Boer guns brought a most effective fire to bear on a white house and kraal, a mile above Bosman's Drift, in which a company of mounted infantry had ensconced itself, at the same time sweeping the line of retreat. Seeing that the little garrison would soon be annihilated, Major Little promptly created a diversion by advancing two squadrons of dismounted Lancers towards the river bank, and drawing the Boer fire till the mounted infantry had effected their retreat.

12 M. Ninth Brigade clear Boers from south bank on left.

Meanwhile in the centre and on the left things were going no better. The 9th Brigade soon reached a point, varying from 600–1000 yards from the trenches, which seemed for hours to mark the limit beyond which it was impossible to advance. An especially galling fire was kept up on them from the intrenched house and kraal which stood on the ridge a few hundred yards south-east of Rosmead dam, and from the broken ground to the west of it. The North Lancashires and Yorkshire Light Infantry were most exposed to it, and Majors Earle and Ottley of the latter battalion were both wounded. Pole-Carew soon saw that the farm was the key of the situation, and in order to take it in flank sent a party of Argylls to charge down a little gully leading to the bush-clad bank east of it, where there was a gap in the Boer lines. About 11 A.M. Lord Methuen came across to see if the 9th Brigade might still retrieve the failure of the attack on the right. Pole-Carew was just sending down another party of Highlanders to the river. Methuen at once joined these and charged right at their head down the open bank. Fortunately he escaped unscathed. But a little later Colonel Northcote, of his staff, was mortally wounded while conveying orders for more men to come up to support the left. Eventually, about noon, two companies of Yorkshires, gallantly led by Lieutenant Fox, rushed the farmhouse, while almost at the same moment the North Lancashires, by a spirited advance, cleared the Boers out of the broken ground to the left. The Free Staters on this section of the south

bank now fell back across the river, or made their way up stream under cover of the bank. The shallow stretch of water below the dam could now be seen, and the idea of forcing a passage at once suggested itself. A mixed body of men from every regiment or corps on the western flank, led by Pole-Carew, now made their way down to the river bank below the dam, and prepared to fight their way across.

Splendid work of guns in centre.

The main work of the battle during all these hours really fell upon the guns. At the first outburst of fire, Lord Methuen had ordered both batteries up to the centre of his front. They came into action east of the railway at about 2500 yards from the river, the 75th a little before the 18th, and, in default of any precise object indicated to Colonel Hall by Lord Methuen, vigorously shelled the line of trees, the Island Hotel, and the buildings round the station. A little later they advanced to 1700 yards, coming under a severe fire. Major Lindsay was here wounded in the hand, but later on resumed command of his battery (75th). But even at this range the guns seemed unable to keep down the Boer fire from the trenches, though they pretty effectively cleared all the Boer sharpshooters from the tree-tops. Colonel Hall now rode up and ordered the 75th to advance. In the teeth of a terrible fire the guns trotted right up to the very front of the Coldstream line and unlimbered within 1200 yards of De la Rey's trenches. Somewhat later the 75th were joined on their left by the 18th, and together the two batteries kept up all day an intense and continuous * rain of shrapnel on the centre of the Boer position. It was a magnificent piece of work. Towards 9 A.M. the four naval guns unlimbered west of the line, and at about 3000 yards range added their fire to the volume of shrapnel concentrated upon the enemy's defence. But though every building visible was riddled through and through, the leaves stripped off the trees, and the ground round the station and the Island Hotel pitted all over with shrapnel bullets, the Boers behind the steep bank and in the advanced trenches suffered little, and

* Nearly 1100 rounds were fired during the day by the 75th alone. Such firing is a heavy strain, not only upon the gunners but also upon the ammunition train, which deserves some share of their credit.

no efforts of the British artillery seemed to make it possible for the infantry to advance. The Boer guns, in spite of the advantage of prepared cover, were quite unable to hold their own against the volume of fire brought to bear on them, and lost heavily in men and horses. At one time Cronje attempted to send back to De Venter the gun he had moved early in the morning, but the heavy rifle-fire this provoked compelled the gunners to abandon the project.

1–2 P.M. British left secures lodgment on north bank.

Towards 11 A.M. a section of the 18th Battery, under Captain Forestier-Walker, was sent across the line to the west to support the flank movement of the 9th Brigade. About an hour later Forestier-Walker pushed his two guns right up behind the North Lancashires on the extreme left and vigorously shelled Rosmead village and the farmhouse and adobe garden wall which commanded the dam and now formed the extreme right of the Boer defence. This proved the turning-point of the battle. Two companies of North Lancashires, under Major Churchward, reinforced by a handful of Highlanders, were the first to plunge into the shallow water some way below the dam, careless of the hot fire that greeted them. The Free Staters on the extreme right did not wait for their approach. They had entered on the battle with a faint heart, shaken by their previous defeats and conscious of their general's incapacity; they had abandoned the south bank without a very serious struggle, and now the shell-fire suddenly directed upon their crumbling defences and the sight of the advancing infantry completed their discomfiture. They abandoned Rosmead village and retreated in disorder upon the centre of their position. The Lancashires at once pushed into the village, clearing the houses and taking a dozen prisoners, but meeting with little opposition. The Boers made no attempt at house-to-house fighting. The actual passage of the river, under cover of the six-foot dam, was no longer hazardous now that the Boers below the dam had gone. Led by General Pole-Carew and Colonel Barter, details of the Lancashires, Yorkshires, Argylls, and 5th Fusiliers, scrambled across the 300 yards of shallow water, slipping and struggling over the slimy stones and floundering waist deep into the pools.

Timely arrival of 62nd Battery. Attack not pushed home on right bank. 2–4 P.M.

The British had now got a footing on the right bank. But more artillery support was needed to complete the demoralisation of the Free Staters, who still hung round the outskirts of the village and among the bushes to the east, and to make possible any advance up the bank. It was at this juncture (at about 2 P.M.) that a battery, men, horses, guns, alike smothered in dust, crawled up behind the left flank. This was the 62nd, which had come the whole way from Orange River in the last twenty-eight hours. Major Granet had pushed on from Belmont at the first streak of dawn and found himself at Honeynest Kloof at 11.30 A.M., hardly knowing whether he had not overshot the column. But the sound of guns ahead determined his course, and with tired horses and more tired men, who had walked alongside the limbers to save the struggling teams, he moved on again at once, and now brought his battery into action most opportunely, first on the left, and then nearer the railway, coming under a heavy fire from the trenches as he pushed right forward in a line with the batteries on his right. Meanwhile Pole-Carew collected together 300–400 men of all battalions and pushed up the bank towards the bridge to within a few hundred yards of Albrecht's guns. But here his advance was checked by a cross fire from De la Rey's Lichtenburgers on the north bank, and the men could not be got any further. Unfortunately, too, the persistent and well-aimed fire of Granet's guns, which were engaged in searching the wood on the north bank, added no little to the dangers to which the little force was exposed, and a sharp counter-attack from the left rear by a small party of Boers who had worked round their flank compelled them to retire upon the village again. This counter-attack was easily disposed of as more men came across the river. If Pole-Carew had been strongly supported by any considerable part of the 9th Brigade, and any other troops, mounted or unmounted, that might have been extricated from their positions, it is more than likely that he might now have been able to turn the Boer defeat into a complete rout and capture Albrecht's guns. For the Free Staters, utterly cowed and demoralised by the shell-fire, were now retreating right off the field, in spite of all the efforts made by Cronje and De

la Rey to rally them. But, with the exception of four companies of the Royal Engineers, a stray half company of the 2nd Coldstreams, and some of Rimington's Guides, no further supports were forthcoming and Pole-Carew was unable to do more than to intrench himself, and hold the village securely.

Lack of direction. Battle dies away.

The fact is that from the very first almost the battle was fought in a number of detached engagements on a wide front, with no general direction or control. Methuen in his despatch declared that the fire to which a mounted orderly was exposed even at 2000 yards range made communication impossible, and that he himself was therefore, for most of the day, in positions he had no right to be in. It is true that the difficulty and danger of conveying orders across the level plain was very great, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Methuen's presence in various parts of the fighting line, instead of at his nominal headquarters by the ganger's hut, was as much the cause as the effect of the difficulty of communication. Practically no orders reached either brigade for the greater part of the day. In a desultory fashion the firing continued for the rest of the afternoon, the British being much too exhausted to force the fighting. Methuen was wounded in the thigh at about 4.15, and half-an-hour later Captain Nugent officially reported to Colvile that he was in command of the division. After 5 P.M. the left of the Guards was withdrawn some distance, a movement admirably covered, under a terrific fire, by all three batteries. On the right Colvile had before this collected a large number of his men at the reservoir, which he had made his headquarters, in readiness for a rush on the trenches soon after sunset. This attack was to be prepared by a bombardment of the whole Boer position which was to last till dusk. Colonel Hale notified Pole-Carew on the north bank of this, and this warning was the first news the latter received of Methuen's wound or of Colvile's intended attack. Pole-Carew had meanwhile collected some 1200 men together, and, but for the prospect of being again shelled by our own guns or of charging into the Guards in the dark, might have made another attempt to advance upon the Boer

guns. The Highland Light Infantry arrived by train just before dusk. As darkness set in the firing gradually died away.

Boers abandon the position during night.

Night fell upon a scene of the greatest indecision and uncertainty. Beyond the fact that Lord Methuen was wounded and that Pole-Carew held Rosmead village, Colvile knew little of what had happened on the rest of the field. Yielding to the advice of Colonel Paget, who had taken over the command of the Guards Brigade, he decided to abandon his projected night attack, and renew the action in the morning, marching his whole brigade except one battalion, which was to hold the reservoir, round by the Rosmead dam. In view of the exhaustion of the men and the absence of information as to the ground, this was, no doubt, the wisest decision. But it was unfortunate that Pole-Carew was not at once informed of it, for in that case his men might still have captured the Free State guns that night. Next morning it was too late. For among the Boers too that night counsels of prudence prevailed. At a krygsraad held at 8 P.M. Cronje decided, in view of the defection of the Free Staters, that it was necessary to evacuate the position and retire on Jacobsdal to meet the strong reinforcements which were still coming up. This decision, approved by the rest of the commandants, met with the bitterest opposition from De la Rey. That stern old warrior had seen his eldest son mortally wounded during the day, but, as he declared afterwards to a friend, that loss did not affect him as keenly as the abandonment of the position. In his view the British would not only fail to dislodge the Boers from their position, but would be compelled in consequence, for want of water, to fall back all the way on Orange River. For once Cronje's judgment was perhaps the sounder, for it is doubtful if the Boers could have withstood a strong attack pushed up both banks of the river from Rosmead. The retreat began before 10 P.M. and was so hurried that Albrecht's guns, whose teams had mostly been shot down by the British shell-fire, were left behind, and were only recovered, some hours after, by the personal exertions of Albrecht and De la Rey.

So all night through the Boers rode off to Jacobsdal, while the British collected in the reservoir and round Rosmead dam. Before the earliest sign of dawn the Guards marched off by the rear across the railway towards Rosmead. While they were doing so the naval guns opened fire at 4.30 and threw three shells at the station buildings. There was no response, and a few minutes later the force realised that there was to be no second day's battle, and that the Boers had abandoned the contest. The buildings and gardens near the station and on the island bore eloquent witness to the severity of the British artillery fire. Dead horses were lying about everywhere. Most of the Boer wounded had been removed, but some twenty dead were buried by the soldiers. The total Boer casualties may perhaps have amounted to 150, mainly due to shell-fire. The British casualties had been 4 officers and 66 men killed and 20 officers and 393 men wounded.* The Argyll and Sutherlands suffered most heavily, both in the attempts to fight their way down to the river bank by the dam, and also later when an attempt was made to move to the left the companies left behind in the firing line near the railway. They lost in all 15 men killed and 2 officers and 95 men wounded.

Nov. 29. British cross river unopposed.

Heavy as these losses were compared with what British troops had suffered in recent years, they hardly in themselves —amounting to little over 7 per cent. of the force engaged— justify Lord Methuen's description of Modder River as "one of the hardest and most trying fights in the annals of the British Army." But casualties are not the only test of the impression a battle produces upon those who

Strain of the new style of fighting. Reconnaissance and frontal attacks.

* The following casualties occurred amongst the officers:—Staff: mortally wounded, Col. Northcote; wounded, Lieut.-Gen. Lord Methuen. Royal Engineers: wounded, Capt. von Hugel. Royal Field Artillery: wounded, Major Lindsay, Capt. Farrell, Lieuts. Dunlop and Furse. 3rd Grenadier Guards: wounded, Major Count Gleichen, Lieuts. Hon. E. Lygon and Travers. 2nd Coldstream Guards: killed, Col. Stopford, Capt. S. Earle; wounded, Lieut. Viscount Acheson. 1st Scots Guards: wounded, Lieuts. Elwes and Hill. Yorkshire L.I.: killed, Lieut. Long; wounded, Majors H. Earle and Ottley, Lieut. Fox. Loyal North Lancashire Regt.: wounded, Lieut. Flint. 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders: wounded, Lieuts. Baker Carr and Neilson. Royal Army Medical Corps: wounded, Capt. Guise Moore.

take part in it. The intense physical strain of lying a whole day under a burning sun without food and with very little water, and the no less intense moral strain created by the danger attending the slightest motion, and by the paralysing intangibility of the enemy, were really new features in war, and account for the exaggerated language employed. But though new, as an actual experience these features of modern warfare ought not to have been unexpected. Modder River only confirmed what students of war had long been declaring would be the result of the improvement in fire-arms. Only a few months before, at the Irish Manœuvres of 1899, Lord Roberts had clearly summed up both the new conditions of attack, and the consequences which a general was bound to draw from them—"Under the existing conditions of war, which render a frontal attack over open ground impossible, reconnaissance is, perhaps, the most important of the many important duties that devolve upon commanders."

General criticisms.

Here was the exact confirmation of Lord Roberts' warning—complete ignorance of the enemy's strength and position leading to an impossible frontal attack. Lord Methuen's despatch, indeed, would seem to assert that the frontal attack was deliberately chosen because the position allowed of no wide detour, and that the frontal attack eventually succeeded. But Lord Methuen hardly did himself justice in this rather incoherent document, penned under the influence of a painful wound. His whole action at the opening of the battle shows clearly that the formation he adopted referred to an impression as to the course of the rivers, and as to the strength of the enemy, quite at variance with ascertainable, and, indeed, partly ascertained facts. The frontal attack failed completely from the very outset, and the position was only carried by a successful turning movement on the left. But so completely had the whole force, including the artillery, been committed to the frontal attack, that the control of the battle almost immediately passed out of Methuen's hand, with the result that, in spite of the providential arrival of the 62nd Battery, not enough weight of support could be got together to enable Pole-Carew's flank attack to be pushed home, while no really determined effort was made to cross

the river on the right flank where such a move might have been even more successful. But whatever criticisms may be passed on the direction of the battle, one must also acknowledge the splendid doggedness with which the whole force, from highest to lowest, stuck to the fight all day, leaving off at night with every intention of renewing the struggle in the morning. Coming at the end of a week of marching and fighting, Modder River was a severe test of the British soldier's mettle, and it proved him equal to the strain.

Mutual recriminations. Mistaken arrest of Boer doctors.

Like several of the earlier battles of the war Modder River was followed by mutual charges of wanton firing upon ambulances and stretcher-bearers. The simple fact was that the ambulances on both sides ventured into the fire-swept zone, and had to take the consequences. There is no reason for suggesting that the Boer leaders, any more than ourselves, intended to conduct the struggle otherwise than in the fairest spirit. A purely fictitious story spread in the Boer laagers, to the effect that Pole-Carew's men had bayoneted some twenty wounded burghers in a temporary hospital at Rosmead, is of interest only as being one of the first of the alleged "atrocities" perpetrated by British troops which were freely used to embitter Dutch feeling and promote sedition in Cape Colony. The Boers, however, had one genuine grievance due to a regrettable mistake on the part of Lord Methuen's Staff, by which the whole personnel almost of the Boer ambulances were seized on the battlefield on the 29th and sent down to Cape Town as prisoners—a mistake whose origin is, perhaps, to be sought in the fact that after Enslin a number of combatant Boers had fraudulently assumed red cross badges in the hope of avoiding capture. When the mistake was discovered at headquarters at Cape Town they were sent back and reached the Boer lines at Jacobsdal on December 9, but without their ambulances, which were never returned.

The news of the battle at Modder River was followed at home by the announcement that a Sixth Division would be mobilised and sent off without delay.

CHAPTER X

STORMBERG

Situation in Eastern Cape Colony.

LEAVING Lord Methuen camped on the hard-won field of Modder River we must turn our attention for a moment to events in the north-eastern part of Cape Colony. The advance of the Boers and the consequent movements of the British troops in that region have already been described in an earlier chapter.* It will be sufficient to remind the reader that Stormberg Junction, evacuated by the British with somewhat unnecessary haste at the beginning of November, was not occupied by the Boers till the 26th of that month, and that on the 27th Sir W. Gatacre moved up his headquarters from Queenstown to Putter's Kraal, thirty miles south of Stormberg Junction, at the same time reinforcing his advanced posts at Bushman's Hoek and Pen Hoek on the Stormberg range. General Gatacre's position was one of great difficulty. With none of the divisional generals had the breaking up of the Army Corps dealt more hardly than with the commander of the Third Division. Of his own division he had only one battalion, the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, and his total force at the beginning of December amounted only to two infantry battalions and about 300 regular mounted infantry, besides about 1000 men belonging to local corps, Kaffrarian Rifles, Cape Mounted Rifles, Frontier Mounted Rifles, Cape Police and Brabant's Horse, barely 3000 men in all, with a few 7-pounder guns. It was not till December 5 that he was reinforced by the arrival of the 74th and 77th Batteries, under Colonel H. B. Jeffreys, and by the 1st Royal Scots. Queenstown in his rear was held by the

* See pp. 280, 281 and 291–297.

half battalion of Berkshires and some 300 of the Queenstown Rifle Volunteers. His right was to some extent—more than was realised at the time—covered by the native districts, but on his left there were no troops nearer than some 900 Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown Volunteers at Cradock, 60 miles to the south-west, and General French, 120 miles to the north-west of Putter's Kraal. The Boer occupation of Stormberg Junction and Steynsburg not only effectually severed his lateral railway communication with French, but plainly foreshadowed a further advance into this great gap in the British defences, while the occupation of Dordrecht on December 2 threatened his right flank and indicated the possibility of a raid on Queenstown. The Boers and rebels were evidently inclined to be aggressive, and there were rumours that an attack on the outpost at Bushman's Hoek was in contemplation. On November 27 some of them had already ridden into Molteno, from which village Gatacre took the precaution to remove a hundred truck-loads of flour on the 29th. On December 7 they engaged the Cape Police in a skirmish at Halseton, 17 miles east of Sterkstroom on the Indwe railway. On the following day the general officially reported the following Boer dispositions: At Dordrecht 800 men; on the march from Jamestown to Dordrecht 700 with six guns; at Molteno 400,* and at Stormberg about 1500. It was not the actual numbers of the Boers so much as the prospect of their indefinite increase by the spread of rebellion that constituted the real danger. The whole vast region to west and south-west was seething with disloyalty. To act on the defensive over so wide a front was almost impossible, and to have complied with all the requests for protection sent in by Dutch and English loyalists for fifty miles round would only have resulted in dispersal and impotence.

Gatacre decides to reoccupy Stormberg.

The situation was not one in which a general could afford to play with time. A counter-blow would have to be struck, struck rapidly and hard, to stem the tide of invasion

* As a matter of fact, only small parties of Boers entered Molteno; no force of the strength given above was regularly in occupation of the village. On the other hand, the total force at Stormberg on the 9th was considerably over 1500.

and rebellion. Nor was General Gatacre the man to sit still and wring his hands over a situation fraught with difficulties. A man of boundless energy and great personal courage, he had forced his way up in the Service by sheer soldierly qualities from the obscurity of regimental duty to important commands in the field. Of gaunt, spare build, his system was impervious to fatigue, and the chief fault that his subordinates had found in him in the past was that he could not appreciate in others the existence of physical weaknesses which were foreign to himself. The object Gatacre set before himself from the first was the reoccupation of Stormberg Junction. Not only was the Junction of strategical importance, but the dispersal of the enemy over a number of different points might give him the opportunity of striking heavily and unexpectedly at the force now laagered in the Stormberg valley. The moment his artillery horses were sufficiently recovered from the journey to be fit to work, he decided to make his spring.

The Boer position at Stormberg.

Stormberg Junction occupies the centre of a typical South African basin encircled by hills through which the railway finds its way out towards Steynsburg and Rosmead on the west, towards Burghersdorp on the north-east, and towards Molteno and Queenstown on the south. On the north the hills are lower, but the rest of the "vlei" is fenced in by formidable heights. The spreading mass of the Rooi Kop covers the whole south-eastern face, the Kissieberg, a much lower ridge, forms the southern and south-western faces, while the west of the basin is bounded by a chain or "triplet" formed by three boldly-shaped peaks rising above a continuous ridge extending northwards from the Kissieberg, and by an isolated hill, north-west of the last and lowest of the three peaks. The curve of these hills may be somewhat fancifully likened to that of a scorpion with its tail angrily looped to sting. Rooi Kop would then represent the body, the Kissieberg, triplet and isolated kopje would form the upper and lower segments of the tail and the back-turned sting, while the nek over which the railway passes out to Molteno would be the junction between body and tail. The Boer laagers were scattered about the basin. The Bethulie

burghers under Du Plooy, with the Albert and Burghersdorp rebels under Piet Steenkamp, together about 800 men, lay close to the station at the foot of the northern reverse of the Rooi Kop. The Smithfield laager, under Swanepoel, nearly 700 strong, was on the south-western slope of Rooi Kop. To Swanepoel was entrusted the defence of the nek, where trenches were dug and two guns posted west of the railway. Olivier, with 800 of the Rouxville commando and one gun, lay to the west close under the western ridge. Though it was mainly at the nek towards Molteno that an attack was feared, the Rouxville men made a few schanses along the western heights and kept a *brandwacht* or picket on the nek between the triplet and the isolated kopje to the north. The whole force was under Commandant E. R. Grobler.

The intended *coup-de-main.*

Gatacre's intention was to surprise Stormberg by suddenly pouncing on it from Putter's Kraal without making any preliminary advance which might warn the Boers and enable them to concentrate to oppose him. He proposed to achieve this by taking his infantry and guns by train as far as Molteno in the afternoon, covering the remaining eight miles to the Boer positions by a night march, and rushing the position at dawn. It was a bold plan, but a perfectly feasible one. Only it required the very greatest care to insure that all the arrangements should be carried out perfectly, that the movement by train should be accurately timed, and that, above all, there should be no possibility of confusion or loss of direction during the night march. It was essential that the troops should not only arrive at the right point at daybreak but that they should arrive as fresh as possible, for the plan was one that asked a great deal of them. Fortunately there would be a good moon for the first few hours of the night during the next few days. And as the general's intention was to march straight along the road which ran by the side of the railway to the nek held by the Boers the chances of error were very slight.

Details of plan. Weakness of force employed.

The move, originally intended for December 8, was put off for a day owing to the difficulty of getting enough trucks together. The force with which Gatacre intended to strike consisted of the Northumberland Fusiliers and Irish Rifles,

the Berkshire company of mounted infantry from Bushman's Hoek, the Southern and Rifle Mounted Infantry companies, and a detachment of Cape Police from Putter's Kraal and Molteno, the two batteries,* the 12th Company, R.E., field hospital, &c., some 2600 men in all. Besides these, two companies of the Royal Scots were to be taken up to hold Molteno, while 160 of Brabant's Horse and 235 Cape Mounted Rifles with four 7-pounders and a Maxim, under Captain de Montmorency and Major Springer, from Pen Hoek, were to join at Molteno. This last detachment was intended to act independently on the right flank, and, if an opportunity offered itself, move round by the nek to the north of the Rooi Kop and intercept the Boer retreat on Burghersdorp. The detailed plan for the main attack was as follows: the troops were to rendezvous in Molteno before sunset, set out at 7 P.M., and get as far as Goosen's Farm, within two miles of the nek, soon after midnight, so as to be able to rest for two or three hours before making the attack. Shortly before dawn the Irish Rifles were to rush the ridge to the left of the nek and capture the guns, while the Northumberland Fusiliers seized the underfeatures of the Rooi Kop on the right. There was only one obvious defect in the scheme, and that a serious one. The force was dangerously small for its purpose: it left no margin for the chapter of accidents. There is no reason why the whole of the Royal Scots, and possibly even the Kaffrarian Rifles at Bushman's Hoek, should not have been taken. Still better would it have been if the half battalion of Berkshires, who had been for weeks at Stormberg, and knew the ground thoroughly, could have been temporarily borrowed from the garrison of Queenstown. It may be said that the Boers at Dordrecht menaced Queenstown and the line of communications. But there can be no worse error in strategy than the splitting up of forces to protect a number of points that may conceivably be threatened. An army is better used as a sword than as a shield, and the risks of an undertaking such as this

* Originally only one was to have been taken, but fortunately at the last moment Gatacre decided to take both.

was are always greater, and should be less lightly incurred, than the chances of a particular weak spot being discovered by the enemy. Once Stormberg was safely seized, detachments could, if required, have been sent back again to secure Molteno and other places; but for the moment the possibility of failing in his attempt was the greatest danger Gatacre had to consider.

The undelivered telegram. Delays in entraining. Dec. 8–9.

At midnight on the 8th the message summoning the Pen Hoek detachment was handed in to the telegraph clerk at Putter's Kraal. The clerk forgot to transmit it, and as the precaution of requesting acknowledgment of the order was not taken, the omission was not discovered till it was too late to remedy it. At 4 A.M. on the 9th the infantry began to pack up and clear camp, and at noon the work of entraining began. The arrangements were not well made, a train-load of mules was allowed to block the line for hours, and the entrainment of the relatively small force took the whole day. The last train did not reach Molteno till 8.30 P.M. Nothing can be more harassing to troops than waiting about in trucks and on railway platforms, especially under an African sun, and the majority of the men started on the night march sleepy and fatigued.

Dec. 9. Gatacre modifies plan at last moment.

Gatacre had arrived at Molteno earlier in the afternoon and held a consultation with his staff and with Inspector Neyland and Sergeant Morgan of the local detachment of Cape Police. A report had come in that the Boers had not only intrenched the south face of the Kissieberg and the nek but had constructed a wire entanglement in front of their trenches. The report was inaccurate, but it alarmed the general, and he now decided to abandon the direct march to the nek and to attempt to surprise the position from one of its undefended flanks. On general grounds there was a good deal to be said for this decision. But it added a whole series of difficulties to an already difficult operation. It involved a night march across unreconnoitred and very inadequately mapped ground, and left the general entirely at the mercy of guides who might indeed know the ground but might completely fail to understand his ideas or the limitations of his men. It inevitably lengthened the night march by several

miles, no light matter, as the force was likely to be both late and tired before it could start. It would have been better in that case for Gatacre to have waited another day at Molteno and allowed the Boers to strengthen their front while he perfected his preparations for a night march upon their flank. If he had done so and had personally reconnoitred the position in the interval there can be little doubt which flank he would have chosen to attack. The nek to the north-east of the Rooi Kop, just above the Bethulie laager, offered both the easiest entrance into the valley and the best point from which to seize the Rooi Kop itself, the key of the position. But Gatacre was determined to go that night, and the point he chose for his attack was the western face of the Kissieberg, *i.e.*, the Boer right. This he was told he could reach by marching to the north-west up the Steynsburg road for seven miles and then taking a path to the right which brought him almost to the point of attack, the whole march being barely two miles longer than the direct route to the nek. Once on the heights he would command the guns on the nek and the whole Stormberg valley. Of the broken and tangled nature of the ground on that side he had no idea. All he knew was that the Cape Policemen selected as guides professed to know every inch of the road, and declared that it was quite fit for wheeled traffic. Captain Tennant of the Intelligence Staff, the only officer who knew the ground intimately and could have informed the general, had been left at Putter's Kraal.

The start. Tail of the column goes astray.

At 9.15 P.M., more than two hours later than had been originally intended, the infantry marched out of Molteno, the Irish Rifles leading. There were no signs of the Pen Hoek detachment, but the general decided to proceed without it. Three days' rations were taken with the force. The column had less than ten miles to cover, which, on a good road, with a bright moon till nearly midnight, ought to have left a sufficient margin for a rest before dawn. The Irish Rifles were ordered to march with bayonets fixed, an order absurd as a precaution and most pernicious in its effects on the men, since the fixing of the bayonet involves carrying the rifle at a particular angle and forbids any easing of the strain by constant changes in its position. The artillery

followed, after a considerable interval, the wheels of the guns and wagons enveloped in raw hide to deaden the sound. Then came the mounted troops. The change made in the dispositions at the last moment had never been clearly explained to the troops, and the greater part of them marched down the Steynsburg road in the belief that they were going straight to Stormberg. One result of this neglect was that the tail of the column, the field hospital and bearer company, the Maxim of the Irish Rifles, and sundry ammunition wagons, actually did go by the Stormberg road and completely lost touch of the column. But for the intervention of a small party of war correspondents, these details would have walked straight into the Boer position at the nek. More astonishing still, Colonel Waters, the Divisional Intelligence officer, who had been left in command at Molteno, and who had been present at the consultation in the afternoon, had apparently not realised that any change in the plan had actually been decided on, and when Colonel Edge, R.A.M.C., sent back to Molteno to ask what he should do, his messenger was told that the detachment was on the right road and should proceed—an order which, fortunately, did not reach in time to cause any mischief.*

* The following extracts from the narrative of Major A. W. A. Pollock, the *Times* correspondent whose intervention probably saved these details from capture, throws an interesting light on this extraordinary piece of bad management:—

"The infantry marched off at 9.15 P.M., and, as we were unwilling to give our horses unnecessary fatigue by a long march at infantry pace, two other correspondents and myself waited half an hour with the intention of accompanying the artillery. The latter, however, not being ready to move so soon as we had expected, we followed after the infantry, whom we supposed to have proceeded by the Stormberg road, which runs in a northerly direction from the town of Molteno. At the end of a little more than an hour and a quarter we began to wonder why we had not overtaken the column, and then found that we were not on the road which they had taken. Naturally, we concluded that the infantry must have moved off the road by some Kaffir path which we had failed to notice. We decided to return and meet the artillery. At the end of about two miles we heard wheels. To our surprise this proved to be the hospital and bearer company, with sundry ammunition wagons, a Maxim gun, and other odds and ends. At the head of this *cortège* rode Colonel Edge. He had been ordered, he said, to 'follow the artillery,' and he was naturally astonished when he was informed that he was actually following nobody.

Guides miss the turning and cross colliery line.

With the main body everything seemed to go well at first, and the men stepped out bravely. But the seven miles seemed strangely long. It was already past midnight, and the moon had set, when the head of the column struck a railway line running directly across the road. This was the colliery line which branches off from the main Stormberg-Rosmead line west of Stormberg, and crosses the Steynsburg road nine miles out of Molteno. It was evident that the guides had missed the turning, and on arriving shortly before

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At this juncture there arrived two sergeants of the Cape Mounted Police, who were likewise under the impression that they were following the detachment of their own corps. From these we learned that the nearest Boer laager was about two miles beyond the point from which we three correspondents had just returned. The time was now 11.30 P.M. After a consultation it was agreed that we should ride back to Molteno and report to Lieut.-Colonel Waters, D.A.A.G., who had been left in command, and from him learn what was to be done. At the best pace that we could muster we hurried back. Having arrived at Molteno Station, we speedily roused Colonel Waters and explained the situation. One of the chief employés of the Intelligence Department was present, and he assured the Colonel, from our description of where we had been, that the detachment was on the right road. Naturally, therefore, Colonel Waters could do no more than request us to tell Colonel Edge to proceed. In short, the officer left in command at Molteno was not aware, nor was his civilian assistant in the Intelligence branch, that the General had changed his plans and elected to march by the westerly route. There was nothing for it but to return to Colonel Edge, as we had promised, so away we went. Within a mile and a half we met the entire detachment marching back towards Molteno! Colonel Edge had decided that they must clearly be on the wrong road. Once more the column reversed, and set out for the second time towards Stormberg. Leaving the wagons to follow at their own pace, we trotted forward, accompanied by the policemen. Just before we reached the furthest point to which we had attained on the previous occasion, we heard wheels and voices from the westward, and, riding up, found one white and four native policemen with two mule wagons, one of which carried the reserve ammunition of the Northumberland Fusiliers. In answer to our inquiries the constable stated that he had lost the column in the dark, and had struck across the veld so as to find the main road. The time was now 2.30 A.M., and it was decided to wait where we were until dawn. Two officers of the Divisional Staff who had similarly lost their way had meanwhile joined the party. At 3.45 we got ready our horses, and, accompanied by the police, cantered forward to reconnoitre. The police sergeants went to the westward, whilst the three correspondents and four natives went east at first; and then, working gradually north and west on hearing the firing to our left front, we cautiously approached the Boer positions amongst the kopjes west of Stormberg."

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR W. F. GATACRE, K.C.B., D.S.O.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

1 A.M. at a farm, which proved to be that of a farmer called Roberts, Gatacre called a halt, and expressed uneasiness as to his position. But unwilling to admit their error, the guides now declared that they had taken a slightly longer road to avoid wire and a bad piece of track which the guns would have found difficult to get over at night, but that the column was now only one and a half miles from the enemy's position. The statement of the guides was confirmed by Sergeant Morgan, and Gatacre, completely at the mercy of these men, could not but believe them, and ordered the force to rest for the next hour. Whether intentionally or not, the guides had seriously understated the distance. As a matter of fact it was nearly three miles; a small matter, perhaps, in the eyes of mounted men, but very serious when it was a question of the slow and weary progress of foot-soldiers at night.

The Boer expedition.

The Boers that night were making an expedition, too. Possibly they had realised in the afternoon that some movement was on foot, and had concluded that Gatacre intended a raid on Steynsburg. Possibly, by a mere coincidence, they had chosen that same day on which to begin an expedition to menace Gatacre's left flank and beat up recruits. Whatever the reason, a few hours before Gatacre started, Grobler and Steenkamp had left Stormberg with 500–600 Bethulie burghers and colonial rebels, and had laagered for the night near the Molteno-Steynsburg road. If, instead of stopping at Roberts's farm, the column had gone on along the Steynsburg road, another two or three miles would probably have brought it right upon Grobler's laager. As it was, the column lay midway between the two Boer forces, unsuspecting and unsuspected.

Recrossing colliery line Gatacre loses his bearings.

About 2 A.M. the march began again. A little later the column recrossed the colliery line along an execrable track winding eastwards into a dark mass of low ridges. Colonel Eager of the Irish Rifles reported to the general that he thought the guide had lost his way. But the guides again protested they knew exactly where they were, and in answer to Gatacre's constant queries during the next hour only replied that the distance was somewhat greater than they

had estimated. But if the guides knew their whereabouts, which is probable enough, they certainly had neither realised clearly what Gatacre had intended to do, nor had they succeeded in making Gatacre understand where they were leading him. It is necessary here to go back a little and explain the cause of a very curious but not unnatural misconception that seems to have entered Gatacre's mind at the moment when the force recrossed the colliery line. Unaware of the fact that this line makes a considerable curve round Roberts's Farm, and observing that the second section of railway he crossed ran in an entirely different direction to the first, Gatacre assumed that on this second occasion he was crossing, not the colliery line, but the main line to Rosmead. In other words, he believed that the guides had taken him much further round than was really the case, and that he was now somewhere to the north-west of Stormberg Junction, moving round on to the rear of the Boer position. It was not till months after the battle that this misconception was corrected.* It is only typical of the confusion of this night march that while Gatacre thought he was approaching Stormberg from the north-west, many of the regimental officers, unaware of the change of the original plan, and knowing that the straight road from Molteno to Stormberg crossed and recrossed the railway at several points, were only confirmed by crossing the colliery line in the impression that they were marching on Stormberg from the south-east.

Gatacre reaches his objective but marches on. Lack of all precautions.

Meanwhile the hours of the night dragged on; the men, cramped from long marching with fixed bayonets, weary with stumbling about on the rough paths, and vaguely conscious that the column had lost its way, grew tired and restless. Towards 3 A.M. the guides had led them through a nek down into a dark and forbidding valley, along the southern edge of which they were now wearily trudging. This valley, one of the many little partitions into which the South African veld

* The map drawn to accompany General Gatacre's dispatch dated January 19, 1900 represents the force crossing the two railway lines, and lays the scene of the battle four miles north-west of the Junction, and as many miles north of the spot where it actually took place.

is divided, formed a rough lozenge a little over a mile across from east to west. To the north it was open, except for an isolated kopje near its north-eastern corner. On the west and south it was enclosed by low ridges. But on the east it was bounded by a continuous chain of high kopjes, seeming a veritable mountain-range in the gloom. It was about 3.45* when the head of the column reached the south-eastern corner of the valley, where another path entered the valley from the south. Gatacre was now, if he had only known it, at the very spot at which he had wished to arrive. That path from the south was the one his guides ought to have taken before, those heights that formed the eastern boundary of the valley also formed the western boundary of the Stormberg basin; he was actually at the western foot of the Kissieberg. Even though the men were tired, and dawn was fast coming on, there was still time to seize the heights as he had planned. But Gatacre believed that he was miles away to the north. The guides knew better; but then they, apparently, misunderstood his plan, and thought that all he wanted to do was to enter the Stormberg valley by road. To do that meant marching another mile or more along the foot of the heights to the nek between the end of the triplet of kopjes and the isolated hill beyond, and for this point the column now marched, passing a farmhouse to the right and crossing the upper branches of a donga which ran diagonally from south to north across the valley. Day had dawned, bathing the tops of the hills in misty deceptive light, and leaving their lower slopes shrouded in a clinging shade. But even that shade was fast giving way to broad daylight as the head of the column approached the nek. Yet in spite of this not a single scout was sent ahead. The infantry, in column of fours, with bayonets fixed, still trudged on in front; the artillery and mounted troops followed in rear. The general seemed to be deliberately courting a surprise.

The Boers alarmed, their sentries fire into column. 4.15 A.M.

Only a few hundred yards, the thickness of the three-peaked ridge, now separated the British column from Olivier's laager. But the Boers were as unconscious of the proximity

* The times on the map are a little earlier than those given in the text.

of danger as the British themselves. Save for a solitary sentry with the small *brandwacht* on the nek which the head of the column was now approaching, the whole laager had lain stilled in peaceful slumber. But now, as day broke, some of the Boers would already have waked, and, drawing their gaily-coloured blankets more closely round their shoulders, would have congregated round the camp fires, where Kaffirs struggled to produce the early cups of coffee. The shivering sentry, gazing down into the valley at his feet, saw a movement in the grey shadow of the hill. Perhaps, too, his ear caught the rumble of a wagon, or the metallic stroke of a hoof against a stone. The movement, indistinct at first, grew clearer as he watched it. A great column of men was marching on the path at the foot of the hills, straight for the very nek which he was guarding—was almost upon it. He waked his comrades. In a moment the ten or fifteen rifle-barrels of the *brandwacht* lay slanting down along the boulders by the side of the path. Then a shot rang out, followed by another and then another. The laager was alarmed. But though surprised the Boers had all the advantage of knowing where they were and what to do. It took no calling of the roll, no falling in or words of command to avoid a panic. At the first shot sleepers and coffee drinkers alike seized their rifles and hastened, some to their horses, others to the positions on the crest immediately above them, and before the British recovered from the first shock of surprise, Olivier's men were spreading everywhere along the heights and firing away wildly into the valley.

Bulk of British infantry make an abortive rush up the hill-side on right.

Had the British but known how near they were to their goal, and how few the men opposed to them at that moment, the leading companies might even now have rushed through the nek and have been almost into the laager. But they were utterly bewildered and ignorant of everything save that they were being fired at, and the column backed confusedly and came to a standstill. Gatacre with prompt decision ordered the leading battalion to deploy and seize the detached hill beyond the nek; but only three companies carried out the order. The rest, together with the Northumberland Fusiliers, had already opened out for the attack, and, without waiting

for orders,* had begun scrambling up the rocky bush-clad slopes on their right. The first impetus of the charge carried the men well up the initial slope. But the ridge was of a formation peculiar to and common in South Africa. About half way up and almost continuous along its whole length ran a *krantz* or outcropping wall of steep rocks, only scaleable at gaps here and there. Against this curtain of sheer cliff the attack came to a standstill. The stormers were as men caught in a blind alley; the heart was taken out of their brief spurt, and the weariness and exhaustion of the long night reasserted itself. Checked by the rocks, dulled by twenty-four hours of labour under arms, unsupported by covering fire, they simply lay down under the cover of the cliff and abandoned all thought of trying to find a way up, or else turned back and ran down again to the plain pursued by a hot but wildly aimed and harmless fire. A few indeed found their way up at the gaps in the cliff, and worked up under cover of the stones and bushes on the upper slope. Conspicuous among these was Colonel Eager, who with a handful of men was manfully battling for that purchase on the crest that would have commanded the laager and perhaps won the day. But there was no one to support them, no formed body in reserve that could have been sent up; the general had gone off to the left, and there was no one to direct the men uselessly crouching under the *krantz* to make their way to the gaps. Within a few minutes almost the whole of Gatacre's infantry had fretted itself away in an objectless attack on the steepest and most difficult part of the Boer position, and the general was left with nothing in hand. It was now that he might have found good use for the battalion left guarding Molteno and Putter's Kraal.

Fighting on left. Artillery in action. 4.30 A.M.

On the left things were rather better. The three companies of the Irish Rifles had made good their hold upon the detached kopje, and only wanted support to enable them

* Many of the officers of the Northumberland Fusiliers seem to have actually believed that the nek over which the path passed was the nek through which the railway enters Molteno from the south and that they were attacking the slopes of the Rooi Kop as they had been ordered to do in the original plan.

to clear the nek and turn the position the rest of the infantry were attacking. The mounted infantry had come up behind them well out on to their left and were thus practically in the Stormberg valley. An immediate bold dash into the valley might possibly have succeeded. But the general wanted men to help to hold the left of the detached kopje, and parties of Boers rapidly came up and held the low folds of ground that ran across the valley and checked a further advance, even if other events had not put that out of the question. Meanwhile at the first burst of fire Colonel Jeffreys had wheeled his guns into line to the left and trotted them across the valley. To avoid the heavy fire of the Boer riflemen the batteries drove as far away from the heights as the donga, which ran across the plain, would allow. One gun of the 74th Battery passed too near the donga and sank through the soft ground at its edge. The efforts of the gunners to extricate it at once attracted a murderous fire from the Boers at about 800 yards range, and as horses and gunners were falling fast it was thought better to leave it for the time being and rescue it later. The rest went on to the foot of the detached hill, where Gatacre ordered them at once to come into action to help the infantry, the 74th a little way up the slope and the 77th on the top of the hill. Driving as far as the horses could get up the rough slope, the men quickly unlimbered and man-handled the guns up to the top. Here the left guns of the 77th came under a heavy short-ranged fire from the Boers, who still held on to the eastern underfeatures of the hill. Major Perceval was severely wounded, but continued to command his battery. Both batteries were now shelling the crest. The light was in their faces and the whole mountain-side was in black shade. Knowing nothing of Colonel Eager and his handful of stalwarts struggling towards the crest, the gunners of the 74th Battery sent several low shots bursting right over them, wounding Colonel Eager, Major Seton, and several others, and effectually driving the rest down the hill-side.

Infantry on right retire. 4.45 A.M.

This unfortunate incident could have had no effect on the fortunes of the day. Before this, the undirected main attack had completely failed. The men were everywhere

dribbling back to the foot of the hill, and barely half an hour after the first shot the officer commanding the Northumberland Fusiliers ordered them to fall back to the donga. But the donga offered little shelter, being enfiladed from the slopes of the Kissieberg, and the retreat was continued across the valley to the low kopjes on the far side. The fire though heavy was too long-ranged to do much damage, and the men retired in fairly good order, stopping at intervals to cover each other's retreat. But they were utterly spent and unfit for any further active fighting. Leaving one company of the Northumberland Fusiliers to hold the ridge, the rest were reformed in quarter column under cover.

Gatacre decides to retire to Molteno. Rest of force recalled.

Gatacre could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his infantry streaming across the plain, amid the hundreds of little puffs of dust beaten up by the heavy fire from the heights. By his almost heroic exertions he had done much to retrieve the effects of the surprise on the left, the side where he still hoped to press home his attack, once the artillery fire and the advance of the main body of infantry had weakened the Boer hold on the crest. The retirement of the infantry put all that out of the question. It was evident that the men were not in a state in which they could be taken forward again to reinforce the left, which was holding its own without difficulty, but was too weak to take the offensive. Reserves there were none. The only thing to be done was to get the whole force collected and reformed on the far side of the valley and beat a retreat to Molteno. The left was now ordered to retire. The artillery fell back by alternate batteries to the northern extremity of the rise that bounded the valley; the three companies of Irish Rifles retired steadily and in good order across the open plain. The mounted infantry remained on the kopje, covering the withdrawal with admirable tenacity, till all the troops had reached the ridge and the guns had come into action again, and then galloped back round the rear of the new position and, dismounting behind the infantry, prolonged their firing-line to the right.

Boers begin to concentrate on every side.

Barely an hour and a quarter had passed since the first shot was fired. But already the sound of battle was beginning to concentrate the whole hornet's nest upon the

British column. Olivier now brought his gun into action on the crest, and Swanepoel, who had at first waited at the nek facing Molteno in expectation of an attack, moved across to the Kissieberg with a number of his burghers as soon as he realised that he was threatened by nothing more formidable than the distant reconnoitrings of an armoured train. Some of the Boers on the Kissieberg came down by Van Zyl's farm at the south-eastern corner of the valley, enfilading the parties of infantry that still kept straggling across the plain, and threatening to cut off the British line of retreat. But Lieutenant Radcliffe's section of Amphlett's Mounted Infantry quickly took up a position on the broad hill to the south of the valley and checked this danger. Grobler and Steenkamp, too, had heard the firing from where they were on the Steynsburg road, and came galloping back to join in the fight. From some rising ground behind the colliery line they began firing straight into the British rear. For a moment things looked serious. But Major Perceval, whose battery was just taking up a new position, promptly swung round three guns, and his admirably ranged shells sufficed to keep Grobler's very half-hearted attack at arm's length. But it was an unusual spectacle to see guns firing thus, trail to trail, and the danger of continuing and waiting to be completely enveloped by the Boers was obvious. For some time past the stream of stragglers from the opposite hill-side and the donga had ceased. Believing all his force to be reassembled, Gatacre concluded that there was nothing further to wait for, and gave the order for a general retirement to Molteno.

Over 600 men left behind.

Astonishing as it may seem, with so small a force, neither Gatacre nor anyone else seems to have realised that there were still some 600 unwounded officers and men at the foot of the Boer position, some in the donga, but the majority under the curtain of rock where the first charge had been checked, or among the stones and bushes on the slope below. It is almost inconceivable that regimental officers can have failed to notice the absence of nearly a third of their battalions. The most reasonable explanation seems to be that officers reforming their men behind the ridge

assumed that the absent companies were engaged in lining the ridge, while those on the ridge in their turn believed everybody else to be behind them. But even that is no adequate excuse, and it is difficult to free the senior regimental officers, especially the officer commanding the Northumberland Fusiliers, who had ordered the first retirement, and should have seen that the order reached all the men on the slope and was complied with, from the charge of grave negligence both during the first and second retreats. Nor is it easy to see why the officers and men scattered on the slope made no attempt to get back. Possibly they may not have realised that the whole force was finally retreating;* possibly, scattered as they were, each party believed itself the only one left and was unwilling to face alone the exertion and danger of crossing the open plain. Many too had long since gone fast asleep after the fatigues of the night. Whatever the explanation, the fact that a third of the infantry was simply left unnoticed is a striking proof of some of the difficulties of modern war, difficulties that may partly be obviated by more widely diffused knowledge of signalling, but whose real cure lies in the greater development in officers and soldiers of initiative, of the capacity to look after themselves.

The retreat to Molteno. 5.30–11 A.M.

Under cover of the guns and mounted infantry the wreck of the two infantry battalions was withdrawn, and retired, between the colliery line and the broad rise which forms the southern boundary of the valley, down to the Steynsburg-Molteno road. Their path necessarily led them in a considerable curve round the Boer position, a difficult and dangerous manœuvre if the Boers had shown the least enterprise. But the occupation of the broad rise on their inside flank by Radcliffe's section, joined later by the Berkshire Mounted Infantry, sufficed to keep the Boers at a distance, and they contented themselves with dropping an accurate but harmless long-range shell-fire into the retreating column, first from Olivier's gun and later from Swanepoel's two guns at the nek. The infantry were utterly exhausted and demoralised,

* Thus one officer of the Northumberland Fusiliers received the order to withdraw his company but disobeyed on the ground that he was well posted to assist the turning movement when it took place.

and after the first few miles the column degenerated into a crowd of stragglers dragging their way along the road. Only here and there an officer succeeded in keeping a small party together. It only needed 300 averagely enterprising men to head the column off, swallowing the infantry in driblets as it came along, to have completed the disaster. But the Boers did nothing beyond occupying successive positions as the British evacuated them, and following up the column at a safe range, like curs yapping after a man armed with a stick. This was mainly due to the mounted infantry and guns, who, by a judicious use of each advantageous position, secured sufficient start for the helpless infantry. General Gatacre himself was with the very reargard, and at the beginning of the retreat narrowly escaped destruction from some of the gunners who, mistaking his little party for Boers, sent a couple of shells right into the middle of them. Three guns were stuck in a quicksand at the spruit which runs across the Steynsburg road at Van Zyl's Farm. Two were dragged out with the help of some of the mounted infantry, but one had to be abandoned. The breech block was removed and thrown into a wagon, which stuck later on and fell into the Boers' hands. A few miles out of Molteno some of the local farmers satisfied their rebellious feelings by firing a few shots at the troops from some kopjes south of the road. About 11 A.M. the remnants of the expedition that had set out so hopefully on the preceding evening staggered back into Molteno.

Criticism of the operations.

Hardly any casualties occurred in the retreat, and very few stragglers were actually left behind and taken prisoners. But long after the retreat was over, 634 unwounded officers and men came out from the hillside where they had remained, and without attempting to fire a shot handed themselves over to the Boers. These figures, taken together with the trifling casualties * of 28 men killed and 10 officers and

* The officers wounded in the engagement were :—2nd Royal Irish Rifles: Colonel Eager (died of wounds); Major Seton; Captains Bell, Kelly, and Welman; Lieuts. Stevens, Maynard, and Lieut. Barnardistone (Suffolk Regiment, attached). Royal Field Artillery: wounded, Major Perceval and Lieut. Lewis. On the Boer side Commandant Swanepoel was wounded and died some time afterwards.

51 men wounded on the British side, and 8 killed and 26 wounded on the Boer side, are the best evidence of the feebleness with which the fight was conducted on both sides. The Boers allowed themselves to be surprised, their shooting was extraordinarily wild, they made no attempt to seize the opportunity offered them of cutting off and completely destroying their retreating enemy. Such as it was, their success was entirely undeserved. The British performance is not quite so easy to criticise. General Gatacre's plan was a well-conceived piece of audacity, and nothing but a most extraordinary combination of bad management and bad fortune could have made it fail against an enemy of such poor fighting quality. The inadequacy of the force taken; the neglect of simple precautions which prevented the arrival of the detachment from Pen Hoek; the long and wearying delays of the entrainment; the change of plan at the eleventh hour, involving an extra effort on the part of the men and a plunge into country completely unknown to the general or to any of the officers with him; the pernicious order to march with fixed bayonets, a precaution whose absurdity stands in all the more striking contrast to the culminating piece of carelessness, the unscreened and blindly confident route march after daybreak over ground of which the general knew nothing save that he was within two miles of the enemy's positions—all these were sheer mismanagement on the part of the general or of his staff. The first error of the guides was pure misfortune, as far as the general was concerned; but that from the moment of recrossing the colliery line the general and the guides seem to have been completely at cross-purposes, so that the point intended for attack was actually reached and passed by, must have been chiefly due to the neglect to take with the column the only officer who knew the ground and knew the local men. When the fight began Gatacre displayed conspicuous courage and energy in trying to repair the mischief of the surprise, till the failure of the infantry set his attempts at naught. In great measure that failure was due to the heavy strain he had put on his men and to the initial confusion

of the surprise. But even making all allowances for this the failure was worse than it should have been, and may be reckoned as part of the ill-luck that attended Gatacre's efforts. Again, the blame for the abandonment of over 600 men, almost the worst part of the whole affair, must be at least shared by the regimental officers, who seem to have made no effort to discover where their men were. The excellent behaviour of the mounted infantry and of the guns was, perhaps, the one redeeming point in a most lamentable collapse.

Gatacre withdraws to Sterkstroom.

In the first confusion and distraction of his defeat Gatacre ordered a general retreat to Queenstown. That retreat would probably have been followed by the spread of invasion and rebellion as far as Tarkastad and Cradock, and by the interruption of the railway communication along the main line from Port Elizabeth to Naauwpoort. Fortunately he countermanded the order almost immediately, in consultation with his staff, and now decided only to fall back as far as Sterkstroom, thus making his headquarters actually nearer to the Boers than they had been before at Putter's Kraal. The bulk of the infantry and the artillery were sent back by train to Sterkstroom during the afternoon. The detachment from Pen Hoek, which had arrived in the course of the day and had reconnoitred out towards Stormberg, returned to its position the following day. The rest of the mounted troops remained at Cyphergat watching Molteno, and then returned to Bushman's Hoek. A few days later Gatacre was reinforced by the arrival of the 79th Battery, R.F.A., and of the 1st Battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment, while the Northumberland Fusiliers were sent down to East London to recruit and be reorganised. The situation in Eastern Cape Colony was now more critical than ever, but fortunately the Boers made no attempt to follow up their success immediately, and before Christmas Gatacre himself, undiscouraged by his reverse, was carrying on successful minor operations in the direction of Dordrecht.

CHAPTER XI

MAGERSFONTEIN

The *terrain* between Modder River and Kimberley.

Rising almost imperceptibly from the north bank of the Modder by the bridge, the veld, covered with scanty grass and scrub and dotted with bushes of thorny, sweet-scented mimosa, stretches away for five miles till it is bounded by the low rock-strewn ridges that run diagonally from Langeberg Farm on the north-west, across the railway near Merton Siding, and for three miles south-east till they terminate in the sharp promontory of Magersfontein Hill, 150 to 200 feet high, jutting out into the boundless horizon eastwards like the prow of a battleship seen against the open sea. Behind Magersfontein a mass of kopjes extends northwards for two or three miles, then sinks down to rise again in a second slightly higher line of hills running from east to west from Scholtz Nek Farm, by Spytfontein Siding, to where it joins the first series of ridges near Langeberg. North of this second ridge come a few scattered kopjes and then a twelve miles stretch of level into Kimberley. The railway makes its way through the lower western half of this complex of hills, but the main road from Modder River to Kimberley goes round it to the east, skirting the foot of Magersfontein Hill, past Bissett's Farm to Scholtz Nek, crossing and recrossing the tall wire fence that marked the frontier between Cape Colony and the adjoining republic. East and south-east of the road the open veld spreads away indefinitely to the horizon, hardly broken to the eye by the sinuous furrow of the Modder passing almost midway between Jacobsdal and the Magersfontein heights. Such was the stretch of country that still lay between Lord Methuen and his goal.

Boers intrench Spytfontein and Scholtz Nek. Nov. 29 –Dec. 4.

During the night that followed Methuen's Pyrrhic victory at Modder River the Boers fell back upon Jacobsdal as has already been related, and were there joined by the rest of Cronje's Mafeking contingent which had come up too late to take part in the action. Early next morning (Nov. 29), in pursuance of the decision of a midnight krygsraad, the combined force moved north across the Modder and laagered near Brown's Drift, about nine miles east of Modder River Bridge. That same afternoon Cronje and the greater part of the commandos again moved north to Scholtz Nek and Spytfontein, and at once began digging trenches and building sangars along the summits of the heights for several miles on both sides of the railway. The rest followed on the 30th, but in accordance with the peculiar tactics already noted in connection with the first part of Methuen's march, the laagers were not moved to Spytfontein, but left ten or twelve miles away on the flank of Methuen's probable line of advance, the main laager being moved, as a precaution, four or five miles east to Rondavel Drift, and the others scattered about between it and Abon's Dam. Jacobsdal itself, though nearly twice as far from the positions selected as from Methuen's camp, and practically undefended, still remained the principal base of supplies for the commandos, and it was not till President Steyn's arrival from Bloemfontein on December 3 that the greater part of the ammunition and stores left in the village were removed to the laagers.

Friction between Federals. Steyn's visit to Boer laagers. Dec. 3–7.

Steyn's visit to the front was due to the serious friction that had arisen between the Transvaal and Free State laagers in consequence of the poor spirit the Free Staters had shown on the 28th. Immediately on receipt of Cronje's report on the battle Kruger had despatched the following earnest and characteristic appeal to his brother President:—

"The Lord is with us . . . and if we now retreat it can only be due to cowardice. I am convinced that it is the want of unity that compelled us to abandon our positions. My age forbids my taking the field with my sons or I would be there now . . . Your Honour must impress upon officers and burghers that they must hold out to the death in the name of the Lord! With this resolve and strengthened by prayer I trust that we shall win the victory;

for Christ hath said,* 'He that will save his life shall lose it, and he that loseth it for the truth's sake shall save it.'"

Steyn had given effect to this appeal in an open letter addressed to his officers and burghers, in which he expressed his deep regret that so many burghers had stayed behind in the laagers while their brethren resisted the enemy, and asked how they could expect help from above if they were not bound together in unity and love. But not content with mere writing he had at once set off, accompanied by his chief counsellor and guide, Abraham Fischer, and now successfully used his personal influence to compose the feud between the two contingents, and to inspire his burghers with a better spirit. On the 7th he left again for Bloemfontein. It is impossible not to admire the activity and resolution President Steyn showed as the leader of his people throughout the war which his own weakness and vanity had chiefly contributed to bring about. In the fateful months that preceded the ultimatum he had been the mere tool of abler and less scrupulous men like Kruger and Fischer, but through all the long struggle that followed he was to be the heart and soul of the national defence, the very incarnation of uncompromising reckless resistance to the end.

Boers reinforced to nearly 8000 men.

At Spytfontein the Boer force was still further strengthened. Immediately after Belmont the Free State Government had decided to recall some of its burghers from Natal to meet Methuen. Some 800–1000 burghers of the Heilbron, Kroonstad and Bethlehem commandos, under Commandants Piet de Wet, Nel and Naude, left Natal about November 26, passing through Elandsfontein on the 28th, and joining Cronje three or four days later. With them came contingents from the Ficksburg and Ladybrand commandos, who had up to this been engaged in watching the Basuto border. From the force besieging Kimberley the Bloemhof and Wolmaranstad Transvaalers and sundry Free State contingents now also came across to Spytfontein, bringing the total force at Cronje's disposal up to nearly 8000 men. De la Rey's

* See St. Mark viii. 35, where however it is "for my sake and the gospel's." The adaptation is characteristic.

attempt to bar Methuen's advance at the Modder River was thus, even if not a complete success, amply justified by the result, for it enabled the Boers to more than double their force before Methuen was ready to move again.

Boers advance to Magersfontein and intrench at foot of ridge. Dec. 4.

But the final battle which was to decide the fortunes of Methuen's column was not destined to take place at Spytfontein or Scholtz Nek after all. On December 2 De la Rey, in the course of a reconnaissance, came to the conclusion that the Boer position was faulty and could be effectively shelled by long-range artillery from the northern extremity of the Magersfontein group of kopjes. Returning to laager he strongly impressed upon Cronje the advisability of abandoning the Scholtz Nek position for a more advanced one at Magersfontein, where the English would be obliged to attack across perfectly open ground. Cronje at first regarded the suggestion with disfavour, and it is said that only Steyn's intervention enabled De la Rey to secure the execution of his scheme. At any rate it was not till December 4 that the Boers abandoned their northern lines and took up a new position in front of the Magersfontein ridges, the main laager being once more moved forward to Brown's Drift. Here at Magersfontein, in full view of the British camp at Modder River, they at once began intrenching for the frontal attack which they fully expected as soon as their slow adversary should be ready to renew his march. A certain amount of trench and "schanz" work was done on the upper slopes of the kopjes. But the most striking feature of the Boer defences was a single line of trenches excavated on the level ground in front of the kopjes and running right along the foot of the whole range. The conception of this field work, one of the boldest and most original conceptions in the history of war, was once again due to De la Rey, whose insistence, backed by the experience of the effects of horizontal fire at Modder River, carried the day against Cronje's contemptuous dislike of innovation. The trenches themselves were made from three to four feet deep and narrow—an important feature, designed to give protection from shrapnel fire, which reached its fullest development later at Paardeberg—and

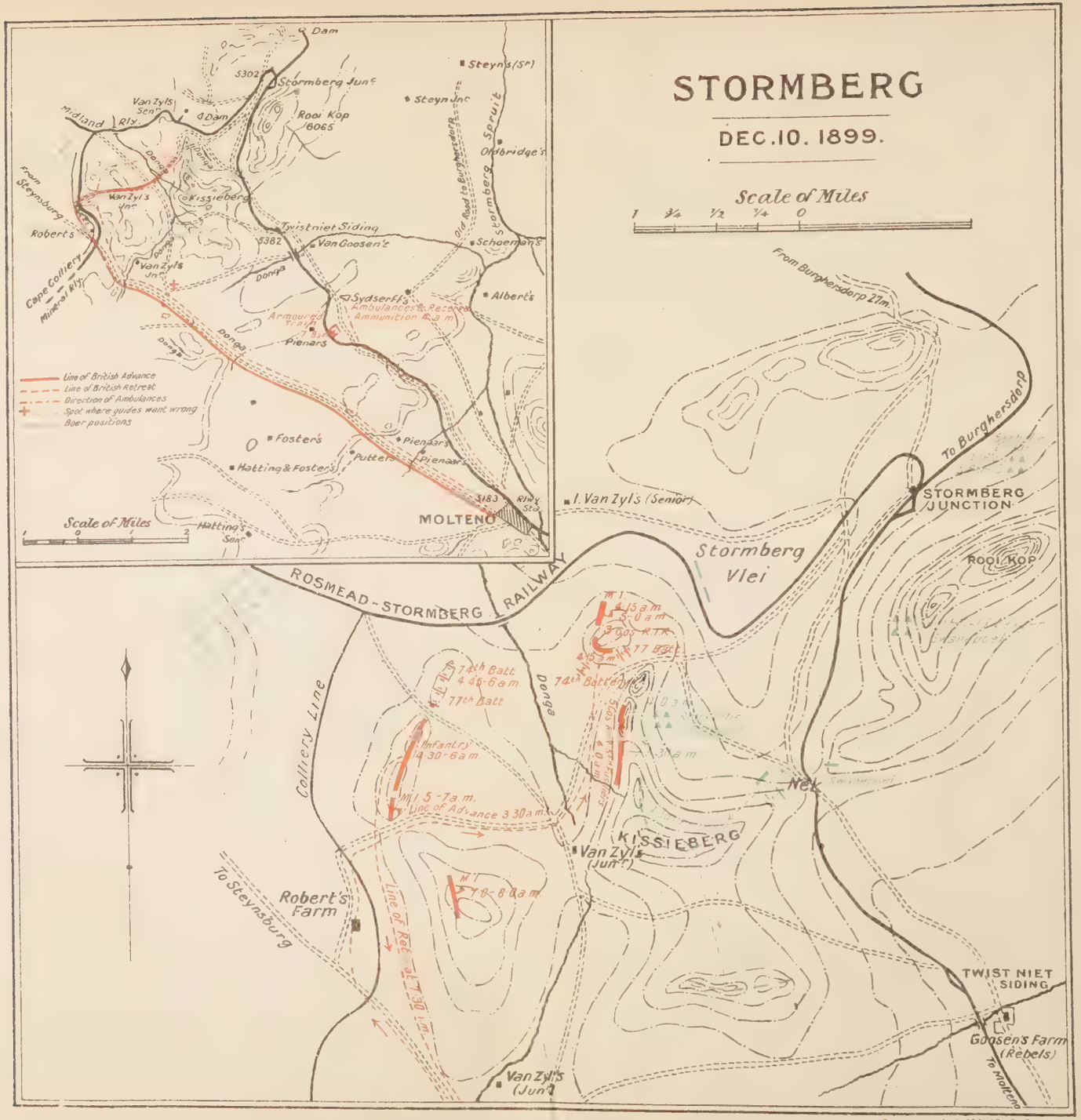
DIRECTIONS

British Infantry

British Mounted Infantry.

Boers

Artillery



Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London.

the excavated soil in front was so skilfully masked with tufts of scrub and branches of mimosa that the trenches were scarcely visible a hundred yards away. As a still further protection against artillery fire the trenches were pushed forward from 100–200 yards in front of the clearly defined foot of the heights. De la Rey had not spent a whole day within 1200 yards of two batteries at Modder River without recognizing the peculiar advantage of having the firing-line some way in front of a conspicuous object calculated to attract the hostile gunner's eye and over-master his attention. Hardly less striking than the position and character of the trenches was the fact that retreat from them during action would be almost impossible. The physical courage of the Boers was often called in question in the earlier days of the war, but there can be no denying the splendid moral courage of the leaders who could place a few thousand undisciplined men, armed only with rifles, in a narrow ditch on the open plain to stop an enemy who had already three times driven them from carefully chosen positions and from whom there would this time be no chance of escape.

Extent of Boer position. Trenches on left only begun at the last moment

On December 8 the Boer trenches extended on the right for about a mile north-westwards from the railway behind Merton Siding. This wing was very much thrown back, and there was a considerable gap before the trenches began again east of the railway, at the foot of a long, low kopje which projected in front of the general line of the heights. The main line of trenches round Magersfontein Hill began in the valley between it and this kopje, slightly overlapping the trenches in front of the latter, and ran on for about 500 yards beyond the south-eastern end of the hill into the dry "pan," or depression, which separated it from two low parallel folds or waves of ground, partly covered by a scattered growth of high bushes, which curved across in a south-easterly direction for about three miles, dying away into the general level of the veld nearly two miles from the Modder. It was only on the 8th that the Boer leaders, realising how easily the position could be turned on this side, decided to carry on their line of trenches along the more easterly of

these folds, right across to the river, where a house and kraal at Moss Drift, six miles from Methuen's camp, formed a convenient steadying point for the flank. These defences were, however, only beginning to be made on the 10th, when the first advance of the British took place, and in the following day's battle the Boer left had to make shift with such hurriedly thrown up cover as could be constructed in a few hours, instead of the careful intrenchments that protected the centre, the last mile and a half towards the river being still entirely unprovided with any cover other than that of scattered stones and bushes. On the right the line was at the same time prolonged up to Langeberg Farm, making the length of front held over twelve miles, or nearly twenty if the base at Jacobsdal be included in it.* These extensions were pure measures of extra precaution, for the Boers had little doubt but that Methuen's attack would be delivered directly at Magersfontein Kop. How certain they were is shown by a proposal made by Cronje in a krygsraad about the 6th that both wings of the Boer force should, instead of intrenching, simply lie concealed in the grass till the British infantry were well engaged with the centre trench, and then rush the British guns from both sides—a proposal showing, too, a significant, though perhaps exaggerated, contempt for the effectiveness of British scouting. But the Boers were not yet tempered to the point of courage necessary for such hazardous aggressive tactics, and the plan was rejected.

Dec. 7. Prinsloo's abortive raid on Enslin. His supersession by Ferreira.

The Boer weakness in offensive tactics was well exposed by an unsuccessful attempt to cut the British line of communications which followed almost immediately after Cronje's proposal. On the night of the 6th Prinsloo set off from Jacobsdal with over 1000 horsemen, and with three guns under Albrecht, to make a descent upon Enslin Station. But Captain Godley and the two companies of Northamptons intrenched there gallantly held their own, and after six hours Prinsloo beat a hasty retreat upon the approach, from

* A considerable part of the commandos was continually in and out of Jacobsdal, which was also the headquarters of a corps of scouts and despatch riders organised under Captains Fichardt and Jooste, who patrolled the country on every side, and kept in touch with the local farmers, who acted as their spies in the British camp.

Modder River, of the 12th Lancers, the 62nd Battery, and an armoured train with the Seaforths. The damage to the line and the wire was repaired in a few hours. But the raid on Enslin had one important result. It led to Prinsloo's dismissal from the position of head commandant of the Free Staters for incapacity and cowardice, and to the election in his place of Commandant A. M. Ferreira, of Ladybrand, an election justified by the improved *moral* shown by the Free Staters at the battle of Magersfontein.

Methuen receives reinforcements at Modder River. Nov. 29–Dec. 10.

Meanwhile, Lord Methuen, whose wound was not sufficiently serious to prevent him from reassuming the command from General Colvile on the 6th,* was resting and reorganising his force at Modder River. Supplies and ammunition poured in freely from the south during the next few days, while the engineers under Major Stewart laboured away at the construction of a low level deviation bridge, to carry the railway till the permanent bridge could be repaired. More important still, considerable reinforcements now joined the column. Between the 4th and the 7th there arrived in camp General Wauchope, with the remaining two battalions of the Highland Brigade, the Black Watch and the Seaforths; the 12th Lancers† with another 100 mounted infantry and G Battery, Horse Artillery; the 65th (Howitzer) Battery, a 4·7 naval gun, promptly nicknamed "Joe Chamberlain," and a balloon section. The whole of the mounted troops were now put under General Babington, while Colonel C. W. H. Douglas arrived to take up the position as chief staff officer hitherto occupied by Colonel Mainwaring. At the same time Methuen's communications were secured by the arrival at Orange River of the Cornwall Light Infantry and Shropshire Light Infantry, and of the Canadian and Australian Infantry contingents, the two latter being pushed up to Belmont and Enslin about the 10th. But it was not till the deviation was completed, and the

* After Modder River, Methuen, though in hospital, was still nominally in command and did not formally give over the command to Colvile till Dec. 2.

† The rest of the Cavalry Division were now joining French at Naauwpoort, and it is perhaps a pity that at least another regiment was not spared, at any rate temporarily, to ensure Methuen's success.

last available infantry battalion, the 1st Gordons,* had joined him (December 10), that Methuen considered himself ready to start again.

Reasons for the prolonged halt hardly justify complete inactivity.

The reasons which decided first General Colvile and then Lord Methuen to make so long a halt at Modder River are intelligible enough. Three hard fights in six days had put a severe strain upon the force. The cavalry horses were done up, the infantry exhausted, the ammunition train nearly empty. Methuen's wound and the losses in the staff and among commanding officers entailed an inevitable amount of disorganisation that needed repairing. Reinforcements, especially of mounted troops, were wanted to make up for nearly a thousand casualties, and to overcome the steadily increasing resistance of the enemy. The restoration of the railway across the river was highly desirable, not only to keep the column supplied, but to enable troops to be sent back quickly, as on the 7th, to repel an attack upon the line of communications. Kimberley was in no immediate straits. Though it could not do much to help the relieving force, it had carried out two vigorous sorties on the 25th and 28th of November, and on the 4th Kekewich signalled† that he had forty days' provisions and plenty of water. The question is whether by delaying Methuen did not sacrifice more than he gained. In the first place he "lost way," sacrificed the moral and strategical advantages he had gained by his rapid advance and his hard-fought victories. The indefinable psychological impression produced on an enemy by an army in motion, the paralysing sense of uncertainty as to whither the next move will be, or where the next blow will fall, are assets in strategy that are thrown away the moment that army comes to a prolonged standstill. Again, the Boers needed a rest after their battles quite as much as the British, and, relatively to their original numbers, received even stronger reinforcements, a fact of which the British were not alto-

* Originally landed at East London on December 8, but brought round because Methuen's requirements were considered more pressing than Gatacre's.

† Electric searchlight and heliographic communication with Kimberley had been begun on the evening of the fight at Enslin, but had not worked quite satisfactorily till the night before Modder River battle.

gether unaware. An immediate advance would have found the Boers incompletely intrenched in a defective position, a disunited and, to some extent, disheartened force. Having beaten the Boers at Scholtz Nek, Methuen—or Colvile—could, if he thought it advisable, have fallen back on the Magersfontein kopjes or on Brown's Drift, and from there have superintended the completion of the bridge, and awaited the arrival of reinforcements before trying finally to disperse the Boer forces round and near Kimberley. But granting that the British commander was convinced that his force was unequal to an immediate advance to Scholtz Nek—a question of which he was, perhaps, the best judge—it is more difficult to justify the complete inactivity during those twelve days, and the absence of any attempt either to prepare the way for the next advance or to interfere with the enemy's preparations to check it. It was evident from the very first that, owing to the waterless nature of the country west of the railway, the way to Kimberley lay either by Magersfontein Hill or up along the Modder River by Brown's Drift. To have seized and intrenched either or both these positions would have been a useful precaution before December 4. Its advisability was still more plainly indicated when the Boers advanced and openly began intrenching themselves right across the British front. The occupation of one of these points was within the capacities of Methuen's force, even though it might not be quite ready to march on Kimberley, and might have forced the Boers to make attempts at recapturing it with the almost certain prospect of defeat and heavy loss. A raid on Jacobsdal, though less directly subserving the object of the march, might have alarmed the Boers, and, even if unsuccessful, have served as a reconnaissance. But the idea of obliging the enemy to conform to our movements instead of conforming to theirs, or of conducting any other operations than the one day's pitched battle, seems, at this stage of the war, to have been entirely foreign to the minds of our generals.

The lack of information.

Not only were no steps taken by Methuen to further his plans or hamper the dispositions of the enemy, but very little was done to gain information about the latter. Cavalry

patrols, indeed, were sent out every day. Some of these had ridden over Magersfontein Hill before the 4th, others were fired at near Merton Siding, while on the 6th a small patrol of the 12th Lancers under Lieutenant Tristram was caught in an ambush on the south bank of the Riet, not five miles from the bridge. But cavalry patrols cannot take the place of trained scouts or spies, especially against a watchful mounted enemy. For the want of these Methuen himself was hardly to blame, though more might no doubt have been done even with the means at his disposal. Anyhow the fact remained that his knowledge of the ground was confined to the immediate neighbourhood of his camp, and of the enemy to what could be seen with field-glasses from the first rise of the veld.

Alternative lines of advance. Methuen ends by deciding on a direct attack.

With this information at his disposal Lord Methuen made his plans for the advance. Of the various alternatives open to him, a flank march by Jacobsdal would have involved subsequently recrossing the Modder in face of the enemy—an operation he had no desire to repeat. There remained an advance up the river to Brown's Drift, along the north bank or possibly on both, and an attack on Magersfontein ridge. The former plan involved making a flank march in front of the enemy's position. But this was more a theoretical than a real objection. For the march would have been beyond effective range even of the Boer guns on the ridge. It was not likely that the Boers would venture out across the open to attack the force, but nothing could, in those days, have been more desirable than if they had. The mere hope of such a thing might have made the flank march worth trying, even if it had served no other purpose. The occupation of Brown's Drift and of the low ridges between it and Magersfontein would have been promptly followed by the evacuation of the latter position. That in itself would have been a great gain, for nothing is more disheartening to a force than to be compelled to abandon a carefully prepared position without fighting. And Methuen's first intention certainly was to carry out this move under cover of a feint along the railway. But at the last moment, acting, it would seem, on the suggestion of his chief of the staff he changed his

mind and decided to rush Magersfontein Hill from its south-eastern end by a night attack. Having effected this, he intended to leave a force of 1200 men and two guns intrenched there, and, holding Moss and Brown's Drift to secure his lines of supply, to push on to Abon's Dam, and from there attack the Boers on Scholtz Nek if they attempted to make another stand. The idea uppermost in Methuen's mind was, no doubt, to strike a heavy blow at the Boers at once, instead of deferring the encounter by a turning movement, and the success gained at Belmont, in spite of loss of direction and delay, had impressed him with the possibilities of a night attack pressed home in very extended order. The fear for his communications can hardly have been a reason for abandoning the move upon Brown's Drift, for the seizure and garrisoning of Magersfontein could have been performed as well after as before that operation. There can be little doubt that Methuen's first decision was the sounder one. And in any case the fact remains that Methuen ended by doing precisely what the Boers expected him to do, and that an advance up the river would, as the Boers themselves have admitted, have met with little effective resistance, and have been followed by the abandonment of Magersfontein. The details of the scheme of attack are also open to criticism. The Boers were known to be holding the ground between the point chosen for the assault and the river, and the attacking force would thus, like Grimwood's brigade at the battle of Ladysmith, be exposed on their right flank or even their rear, if the attack was only partially successful. An attack on the south-western end of the ridge, over the smaller advanced kopje near the railway, would have been free from this objection, for the Boer right was too far thrown back to have been able to interfere to any effect.

Dec. 9 and 10. Methuen shells Magersfontein Hill.

On the 9th a few trial shells had been fired at the hills by the 4·7 naval gun from the ganger's hut, three miles up the line from the bridge. But it was not till the following afternoon, Sunday, that the attack began in earnest. At 3 P.M. the Highland Brigade under General Wauchope, to whom, as the freshest portion of his force, Lord Methuen had decided to entrust the night attack, moved up to the slight rise,

afterwards known as Headquarter Hill, on the left of the Kimberley road, about four miles from the station. From there the Black Watch on the left and the cavalry on the right, the 9th Lancers in front, advanced in extended order along the whole eastern front from Magersfontein to the river as far as the first fold of ground without becoming seriously engaged, and fell back by order about 4.30 P.M. as the guns opened fire. For the next hour and a half the whole of the artillery *—the naval gun at 7000 yards on the left, the howitzers at 4000 west of Headquarter Hill, and the three field batteries drawn up in line on the right at 2700—concentrated an intense fire on the slopes of Magersfontein Hill. The hail of shrapnel, and the great volcano jets of red earth and ironstone boulders hurled fifty feet high by the bursting lyddite, seemed to convert the whole hillside into a perfect inferno of fire. Lord Methuen had no doubt but that he was inflicting heavy loss, and producing a profound demoralisation among the Boers which would materially help the night attack.

The Boers are warned.

The Boers lost three men wounded. They gained, firstly, information, and, secondly, confidence—the two main essentials of victory. They now knew that the expected attack on Magersfontein was not far off. They also knew that to men securely intrenched the appalling roar of bursting shell meant little more than the din of a thunderstorm. De la Rey could not have arranged a better demonstration of the soundness of his tactics, or found better means to exhort the burghers to stay in their trenches, than this ineffectual and purposeless cannonade. There were certain courses that might have justified Methuen's action. One was to have utilised the cannonade as a feint and to have marched that night on the laager at Brown's Drift. Another was to have at once occupied the ridge forming the Boer left, at that moment very weakly manned and only partially intrenched. This Wauchope would apparently have done if he had not been recalled by Methuen, and the evacuation of Magersfontein would probably have followed. A third was to have

* Except the naval 12-pdrs., which throughout remained behind to guard Modder River Camp.

attacked the hill itself late that same afternoon. In the failing light, still further obscured by a heavy drizzle, an otherwise impossible attack might, perhaps, have been carried through without great loss, though the occupation of an unreconnoitred position at nightfall was not without its dangers.

Cronje's dispositions for the expected attack. His night-wandering.

Cronje, when the bombardment opened, was at the head laager at Brown's Drift. As soon as it ceased he galloped off to Magersfontein with half-a-dozen "adjutants" to complete all preparations in expectation of an immediate attack. Riding on to the summit of the hill by the nek on the north he surveyed the damage done and then walked down to the trenches and held a council of war with his leading commandants. In the main the positions of the commandos had already been assigned. All that was necessary was to warn commandants and field-cornets to see that their men were in the trenches and ready to meet an attack before dawn. On the right Cronje had placed his brother Andries, with the Klerksdorp and some of the Potchefstroom burghers and sundry Free State contingents. In all there may have been 1500–2000 Boers west of the railway and on the hills behind who took practically no part in the next day's battle. The centre trenches were held by about 2500 men, mostly from Potchefstroom—men of Cronje's own commando on whose courage he could rely—under Commandants P. Schutte and Martins, and some Bloemfontein and Hoopstad Free Staters. On the left were the Ladybrand, Ficksburg, Senekal, Heilbron, and Kroonstad Free Staters under Ferreira, and the Lichtenburg, Wolmaransstad and Bloemhof Transvaalers under Commandants Vermaas, F. J. Potgieter and Tollie de Beer. Of these about 2000 probably took part in the action, though barely half that number were in their places when the battle opened. Nominally De la Rey was in command of the whole left wing. But at that moment he was at Kimberley, where he had gone to meet his wife—to tell her, one may surmise, of her brave son's death—and in his absence the commandants acted on their own judgment. Albrecht, with a Krupp and the Jacobsdal and Fauresmith burghers, had for some days been quartered between Brown's Drift and Jacobsdal to cover that place and, if possible, to demonstrate

against the British camp. Five Krupps and two "pom-poms" were posted on Magersfontein ridge and the heights behind. The only guns on the left flank were two or three "pom-poms." Mention should lastly be made of the Scandinavian contingent, a little force that had already shown its courage at Mafeking, which was now sent forward about 1000 yards in front of the Boer left to cover the gap between it and the Boer centre. After giving his final instructions Cronje threw himself down on the wet ground to snatch a few hours' sleep. At one o'clock he started up, climbed the hill again, and, summoning his staff, rode off in order to inspect the left wing and make sure that the men were watchful and in their trenches. But in the streaming rain and inky darkness he completely lost his way, and after two hours and more of vain groping found himself, just as night was growing grey, back at the foot of Magersfontein Hill, not 200 yards behind the end of the main trench. What strange sequence this night-wandering of the Boer general and his little staff was yet to have the next few pages will show.

Methuen's final arrangements.

Lord Methuen had meanwhile, during the afternoon of the 10th, completed his arrangements for the morning's battle. The 9th Brigade, which was to act principally as a reserve, was considerably broken up. The North Lancashires were left with the Naval Brigade to guard the camp. The Yorkshire Light Infantry were guided three miles up stream to Voetpad's Drift, which they occupied and intrenched without opposition. General Pole-Carew, with the Northumberland Fusiliers and Northamptons, had already advanced some distance on both sides of the railway during the afternoon, and bivouacked at the ganger's hut. His orders were to make a demonstration on the left flank, but not to force the fighting. The safety of the camp was at the same time intrusted to him. The Guards, during the afternoon, struck their tents on the "Island"—another warning to the Boers—crossed the drift after dark, and bivouacked on the north bank with orders to march off to Headquarter Hill at 12.30 to be ready to act as a support wherever required. The transport was moved up behind the same rise, in readiness

for an early advance next day. Here the Highland Brigade, guns, and most of the cavalry were already in bivouac. The cavalry, joined at daybreak by the 12th Lancers, were to cover the right flank of the Highlanders, a disposition which would indicate that Methuen underestimated the strength or, perhaps, hardly realised the proximity of the Boer left wing.

Wauchope's reluctance to undertake the attack.

The Highland Brigade, lastly, was to march off at 12.30 for the attack. It was to be guided by Major G. E. Benson, R.A., who had previously, at great personal risk, ascertained the bearings and distance of the south-eastern point of the hill. Shortly before dawn the brigade was to deploy, and in widely-extended order rush the hill, much as the Guards had rushed Belmont. The task was one that Wauchope undertook with reluctance. From the very first he had realised, better than most of his colleagues, the seriousness of the conflict upon which the nation had entered. Nor did he now hesitate to express to his commander the doubts that rose up in his mind at the thought of the hazardous venture to which his brigade was being committed. It was this expression of opinion that, after the battle, gave rise to painful and inaccurate rumours to the effect that there had been a serious personal disagreement between the two generals. Once the decision was made, Wauchope was resolved to carry it out at all costs, and when, at the last moment, postponement of the enterprise, on account of the unfavourable weather, was seriously debated at headquarters, he declared himself opposed to any delay. It was the natural thing for a brave soldier to do, but there can be little doubt that Lord Methuen would have been well advised to have put off the attack. The rain, which had increased with the darkness, had towards midnight become a steady downpour, and a recollection of the difficulty and confusion attending night marches, even in the best weather and over well-known ground, ought to have counselled greater prudence.

Dec. 11. 12.30 A.M. The start.

Soon after 12.30 A.M. the Highland battalions moved out silently * into the night. They were drawn up in mass

* Two rifles went off accidentally at the start, but it is doubtful if on such a night they were heard by the Boers, wide awake though they were in expectation of the attack.

of quarter columns,* with six paces interval between companies and eight paces between battalions. This, the most compact formation possible, was rendered advisable by the roughness of the ground and the fearful weather; in no other way would it have been possible to bring so large a force within striking distance of its object on such a night. The Black Watch led, followed by the Seaforths, Argylls, and Highland Light Infantry. Ropes held by the left guides connected some, but not all, of the battalions. At the head of the column on the left was Benson with two of Rimington's Guides. To his left again strode the ill-fated Wauchope, with his two aides-de-camp, Captain Rennie and Lieutenant Wauchope, his cousin. Alone of all the officers in the Brigade the general still carried his old claymore. Before starting Wauchope had fully explained his plan to his staff and to his commanding officers. The brigade was to halt at a point south-east of the extremity of the hill, there deploy† under cover of darkness, the three kilted regiments in front and the Highland Light Infantry in reserve, and then lie down, ready to rush the position with the first light of dawn. By the position Wauchope understood the south-eastern face of the hill itself. Of the extension of the line of trenches into the level beyond the point where the hillside began to recede northwards, neither he, nor Methuen, had any idea.

The night march. Wauchope's anxiety to be in striking range before deploying.

The night was pitch dark. Beneath the continuous rain the sandy veld, dry and burning but a few hours before, had turned into a waste of sodden mud, broken only by an outcrop, here and there, of scorched ironstone boulders, by wiry patches of leafless scrub, or waist-high clumps of prickly mimosa, unsuspected till the front ranks stumbled upon them. No sooner had the column started, than the downpour, accompanied by a heavy thunderstorm, redoubled its violence. Through the blinding curtain of obscurity and rain the only thing that was now and again visible, besides

* *I.e.*, company behind company, each company in two lines in close order with a third line of "supernumeraries," the whole forming an almost solid rectangle of men in ninety-six successive lines.

† At five paces interval, each of the three leading battalions with two companies in the firing-line, two in support and four in reserve.

the continual flashes of vivid lightning, was the misty violet beam of the Kimberley searchlight flaring along the northern sky. Yet in spite of the inky gloom and the disturbance to his compasses caused by the lightning, Benson guided the column unswervingly from start to finish along the course he had marked out. But the advance was painfully slow, and again and again the column had to halt. It was already half-past three, and the night was perceptibly beginning to grow grey. But though the outline of the hill could now, as the rain ceased, be dimly descried, it was impossible to judge the distance that still divided the column from its objective. Twice Benson whispered suggesting that the time had come to deploy. But Wauchope was anxious to press on a few hundred yards more, while the column was still in a formation which enabled it to move comparatively quickly. It was already late, deployment would add another fifteen minutes, and practically put an end to any further advance before dawn. At all hazards Wauchope was resolved that dawn should not find the brigade beyond striking distance of the position. The column moved on a little further without mishap. The word to extend was just about to be given when the Black Watch struck into a line of thick thorny bush, through which they made their way with difficulty in twos and threes as gaps were found. It was impossible to deploy in the middle of the bushes, and sooner than bring back the head of the column the general decided to get the whole brigade past this obstacle. This meant another 300–400 yards' advance. The Black Watch, having reformed on the farther side of the bush, moved on slowly while the remaining battalions found their way round to the right. Before the Highland Light Infantry were in position again Wauchope ordered the column to halt and deploy outwards, the Seaforths moving forward to the left of the leading battalion, the Argylls to the right, and the Light Infantry holding themselves in reserve. Whether Wauchope clearly realised that he was already within 600–700 yards of the hill it is impossible to tell. But what is certain is that neither he nor any one in the force knew that between them and the hill, and barely 400 yards away, ran the Boer trenches, lined by thousands of

rifles, over whose barrels keen eyes were peering into the gloom, while keen ears were strained to catch the faintest sound of the expected advance.

The brigade surprised while deploying. 4 A.M.

Daylight was already showing clear above the heights, and the grey figures of the men were fairly visible at a few yards distance. The two leading battalions were in the act of deploying. A and B companies of the Black Watch had gone forward nearly 100 yards, and were just extending clear of each other. But a few minutes more and the whole brigade would be ready for the attack. Wauchope may well have congratulated himself that he had successfully brought his men within striking range: he knew he could trust them to do the rest. Suddenly, from every side, from the left, from the ground almost at their feet, from the hill-side beyond, from the bushes and sand heaps to their right, flashed out a line of fire, and an appalling sleet of missiles swept through the close locked ranks of the Highland Brigade. The Boers had detected their presence,* and from their magazines poured in a quintuple volley into the enormous target in front of them, their rifles becoming, to quote the expression of one who was there, "as it were so many Maxims." Never were troops caught at a more terrible disadvantage than the hapless Highlanders. They were surprised in what was more fatal than the worst of all formations, namely, at the halt, and in the very act of exchanging one formation for the other. It was an awful moment, destined to haunt for ever the memories of those who lived through that day. Fortunately the fire was mostly too high, and the casualties, though considerable, especially among the officers of the leading companies, were but a small fraction of the total losses suffered by the brigade in the next few hours. The bulk

* Of the various stories told at the time of Boers or colonial traitors accompanying the column, of lights flashed out on the left or of the single shot close by that gave the signal, the most probable is that a Boer sentry was posted a little way in front of the trenches and that he fired before running back. There is, however, some ground for believing that a general warning of the movement—though further warning than Methuen had already given was scarcely needed—was made from the farm at Voetpad's Drift by the use of lanterns.

Map of NORTHERN CAPE COLONY

showing the Boer Invasion and the movements of Troops down to the end of 1899.

DIRECTIONS

Railways

Telegraph lines besides those following the railways

British } The continuous lines indicate advances the dotted lines retreats

Boers

Camps or Headquarters of larger forces

Patrols or skirmishing parties

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of the men in the two leading battalions endeavoured hurriedly to complete their extension and lay down, fixing bayonets in readiness for the charge. But there were many who gave way before the sudden terror of invisible death before them. Some fear-maddened soldier may have shrieked out the word "Retire." A number of men in the rear companies of the Black Watch ran back into the ranks of the Seaforths. The movement communicated itself to the battalions still closely packed in rear, growing as it went, and a minute later, in spite of all the efforts of officers to keep their men lying down, a mob of broken men stampeded back to the line of bushes, leaving a hustled, trampled but steadfast remnant—barely half the brigade—lying scattered on the scene of the disaster, waiting for their general's orders.

Wauchope's last orders and death.

At the first burst of fire General Wauchope, at once realising the cause of the disaster, walked forward in front of the leading companies to ascertain, if possible, how far the advanced trenches extended. A glance at the line of flashes was enough. He immediately sent back his cousin to tell the Black Watch to reinforce on the right as quickly as they could. Young Wauchope ran back along the lines of prostrate men, gave the order to Colonel Coode and to all the officers he could see, and then hurried forward again to the spot where he had left the general alone. But before he returned Wauchope had fallen, and a moment later his devoted aide-de-camp fell wounded too. Coode gallantly led his men forward, but was killed almost immediately. Next day all three were found close together within 200 yards of the trenches. Such officers of the Black Watch as were unwounded doubled forward their men to the right of the two companies already extended in front. At the same time Colonel Hughes-Hallett, the only commanding officer untouched,* acting promptly on his own initiative, and disregarding the last orders received before the catastrophe swung out the Seaforths to the right, where in the dark their leading companies at once became inextricably mixed up

* Lieut.-Col. Goff of the Argylls was killed and Lieut.-Col. Kelham of the Highland Light Infantry, who was only lightly wounded, had been trampled over and carried away by the stampede.

with those of the Black Watch. Together the men of the two regiments pushed forward, in spite of a murderous fire, into the broad gap to the right of the Boer trenches, crawling with some difficulty through an old wire fence * which ran along to the left of the road and had apparently been drawn back till it joined the end of the trenches.

The Highlanders through the Boer line. The hill all but captured.

Not twenty minutes had passed since the first surprise, and already several hundred of the Black Watch and Seaforths had made their way round to the eastern foot of the hill, where another fence delayed their advance. One brave little party of 20 or 30 men, led by Captain MacFarlan, adjutant of the Black Watch, rushed straight up the south-eastern point of the hill. But the converging fire from our own men behind, and the shrapnel of the British guns, which had just begun to open fire on the point of Magersfontein Hill, drove them down again. A little further to the right Lieutenant Cox, of the Seaforths, with three or four men, climbed up the hill-side—the party were seen falling back again, but were all killed before they reached the bottom. The rest pushed on along the very foot of the hill, where they were to some extent covered. At their head was a party of nearly 100 men, led by Lieutenant Wilson, of the Seaforths, and Sergeant Frazer, of the Black Watch. Finding themselves almost round the reverse of the hill, they now swung round and began rapidly climbing up. A minute more and they would have been on the crest and taking the Boers in rear.† For a moment it seemed as if the dead general's last order would still save the day. But the issues of battle often hang on the slenderest thread, and a mere chance was now

* It was this fence and the one mentioned immediately afterwards which were responsible for the exaggerated stories of barbed wire entanglements which figured so prominently in contemporary descriptions.

† This movement is insufficiently indicated on the map, which was unfortunately completed before its full extent was made clear by evidence subsequently received. A few men seem actually to have gone right on to the valley between Magersfontein and the next hill to the north of it, where the Boer horses were haltered and where there was a small camp. Lieutenant Wilson's attack was made a little beyond the words "Magersfontein Kop" on the map, and Captain MacFarlan's by the green cross marking where Cronje had been when the firing broke out. Between these two points a considerable number of Highlanders lay till after 6 A.M.

destined to turn the scale against the ill-fated Highland Brigade. It has already been related how Cronje and his little staff of six adjutants, after straying blindly about the veld in the darkness, suddenly found themselves a few hundred yards on one side of the end of the main trenches almost at the same moment that Wauchope was deploying his men on the other. When the firing broke out, Cronje made his way up the kopje behind him, taking cover in rear of the crest-line. Suddenly one of his adjutants saw, in the grey half-light, a line of dim figures coming straight up the hill from his left, and pointed them out to his chief. Besides Cronje and his staff there was not a soul on that side of Magersfontein Hill. But Cronje was not the man to hesitate at such a moment. "*Schiet, kerels, schiet!*" ("Shoot, boys, shoot!") he shouted to his adjutants, throwing himself down behind the nearest rock and discharging the contents of his magazine into the advancing Highlanders. So sudden and fierce was the fire of these seven rifles that the assaulting force, ignorant of the great chance within its reach, checked, and began replying to the fire. At this very moment the Boers on the east of the pan began to push forward in order to close the gap through which the whole Highland Brigade was threatening to make its way. Their fire took the advancing companies of Seaforths and Black Watch in flank. To add to the mischief, the British guns, sweeping with shrapnel the hill-side and the level pan across which the Highlanders were struggling to advance, effectually prevented any support reaching the little force clinging to the slope. Completely cut off, searched by the Boer fire from in front and behind, and raked by the British guns from their left, they at last wavered, broke, and rushed across the pan towards the rising ground beyond. Here they were surrounded, and after a short struggle the survivors, 30 or 40 in all, were made prisoners. The night attack had finally failed.

Position of the Highland Brigade at daylight.

And now day, rising fresh and clear after the night's storm, flooded the scene of the disaster with pitiless light. The shattered fragments of the Highland Brigade lay strewn all along the front of the Boer trenches. Absolutely exposed on the bare veld to a point blank fire from the trenches and

from snipers on the hill behind, the leading companies began to suffer terribly. The khaki aprons which had been issued proved no protection as the men lay prone on the sand, and the dark kilts, and, even worse, the bright metal of the canteen tins, only served to furnish the enemy with a conspicuous target. Of the officers many had fallen, and the rest, dressed as they were in every detail like the rank and file, were not easily distinguished by the bewildered eyes of the men where companies and battalions alike were inextricably mixed together. Nevertheless, during the next hour one brave attempt after another was made by the Highlanders to achieve the impossible and fight their way to the trenches. Near the scene of the original disaster small parties of the Black Watch got within 150 yards of the main trench, where they were gradually picked off by the Boer riflemen, only a few who found a sheltering bush or ant heap, and lay absolutely motionless all day, managing to escape.* In the centre a scanty line of men still lined the eastern foot of the hill. But fired at from the crest in front of them, and from across the pan directly in their rear, it gradually dwindled away. Between 6 and 7 A.M. the shrapnel of our batteries drove the survivors back across the Kimberley road, and the Boers finally closed the gap between their centre and left. On the right, Hughes-Hallett, who had succeeded in keeping a large portion of his battalion well in hand, had already twice attempted to push forward against the trenches on the Boer left. But so heavy were the losses in officers and men of the Seaforths, that the attempt was abandoned It was about this time, however, that the Seaforths, helped by the fire of G Battery, R.H.A., surrounded and completely destroyed the little body of Scandinavians under Field-Cornet Flygare, who, with reckless courage, had refused to abandon their advanced post. Meanwhile in rear, behind the line of bushes, officers had been

* So impressed were the Boers by the gallantry of one small party of these men, of whom only three were left unwounded, that towards 2 P.M. one of their commandants went forward unarmed and told them they would not be fired at any further if they promised not to return the fire. At sunset the Boers told all of them who were able to walk that they might go away unmolested, leaving their arms and ammunition behind.

busy rallying the men who had run back at the first surprise Kelham led forward a number of the Highland Light Infantry, mixed with men of all the kilted battalions, to support Hallett, whose right was continually being drawn out along the bushy ridge to meet the flanking fire of the Boers. Other parties pushed forward on the left against the centre trenches. Lieutenant Lindsay took the Seaforth Maxim round to the extreme left of the line, very pluckily under a heavy fire cutting down an opening for it through a barbed wire fence, and there fought it for half an hour in the open, till two wounds and the loss of most of the detachment compelled him to cease fire. From 6 A.M. onwards the bulk of the Highland Brigade lay scattered in little groups and straggling lines along a front of fully three miles, and at a distance of from 200–600 yards from the trenches. Spasmodic efforts to rush the trenches were still made from time to time, but gallantry was powerless in the face of overwhelming advantage of position. For the rest of the morning the men lay there, exposed to a pitiless short-range fire, their faces pressed flat against the glowing sand, and the bare insides of their knees blistered by the burning sun.* It had been impossible to make coffee before the start of the night march, their water-bottles were in many cases all too speedily emptied or given to wounded comrades, and they now suffered all the tortures of intense thirst. Rarely have troops gone through so severe an ordeal.†

* Hundreds of otherwise unwounded Highlanders were completely lamed for several days, and almost as much in the hands of the doctors as their less fortunate comrades.

† Few accounts yet published have done sufficient justice either to the splendid courage with which the unshaken portions of the brigade sought to retrieve the initial disaster or to the endurance of the rallied men who hung on practically unsupported for eight or nine hours in front of the trenches. It was during these gallant struggles and not in the original surprise that the heavy losses of the brigade, especially of the two leading battalions, were chiefly incurred. Officers and correspondents in rear who only saw the unrallied Highlanders hanging about behind the outskirts of the battle, the gradual trickling back of individuals during the midday hours, and the total demoralisation of the brigade after it had been tried almost beyond human endurance, drew pictures of the battle on which the narratives of regimental officers and even of the Boers in the trenches throw a very different light.

The artillery in action.

As it was the Highlanders could never have hung on at all but for the guns. It was barely light when the guns opened at 4.20, and the unfortunate effect of some of their first shells has already been referred to. But they now proved invaluable in keeping down the fire from the Boer trenches. The naval gun and howitzers plied the hill-side and trenches with lyddite, the latter at 3500 yards, while the field guns opened at about 2000 yards. Towards 6 A.M. Colonel Hall ordered up the 18th Battery to a point to the left of the Kimberley road and 1370 yards from the trenches. At 7 A.M. it was joined by the 62nd, and the two batteries stayed in this exposed position for the rest of the day. The 75th, somewhat later, moved off to help in checking the continued Boer attempts to enfilade the right of the Highlanders on the low bushy ridge.

Babington supports Highlanders' right. 5 A.M.

It was on this exposed right flank that the situation, from the moment the night attack had failed, was most critical, and it was mainly due to the promptitude and energy of General Babington that the right of the Highland Brigade was not crumpled up within the first hour after daylight. The Cavalry Brigade had moved off at 3 A.M. and, soon after the first outbreak of fire, was advancing in extended order towards the first low ridge between Magersfontein and the river. On the right the advance of the 9th Lancers was very soon checked by a heavy fire from the Boers on the further ridge. On the left Babington had first sent forward G Battery, Horse Artillery, under Major R. Bannatine-Allason, to support the Seaforths. Soon after 5 A.M., seeing that the Boers were threatening a fresh move against Hughes-Hallett's right, Babington brought up the 12th Lancers and Mounted Infantry, under Lord Airlie and Major Milton, and, dismounting them, pushed them forward into the fighting line on the right of the Highlanders. Not only was the menace of a Boer advance checked, but the Seaforths were able to gain a little ground, supported by G Battery, which pushed up with them to within 1000 yards of the enemy.

Methuen makes no attempt to support

Lord Methuen had known, almost at once, of the disaster which had befallen the Highland Brigade. The heavy firing from the Boer trenches, and the sight of stragglers dribbling

back across the plain, were evidence enough that the night attack had failed, even if he had not learnt the full details from Major Benson, who had come back cool and unscathed out of the awful mellay. The one thing to do was to support the Highlanders without delay. The Guards Brigade had meanwhile arrived at Headquarter Hill, and though they were nearly three miles in rear of the critical point of the action, there can be little doubt that if they had been sent forward immediately into the gap between the Boer left and centre, they could still have wedged their way through and have taken the hill. But Methuen had, apparently, never contemplated the possibility of the Highlanders not succeeding at once. He had no alternative ready, and straightway resigned himself to letting the Highland attack—though it involved the fate of the whole battle and possibly the fate of Kimberley—stand or fall on its own merits. Including the Gordons, who were acting as baggage guard, he had five battalions immediately under his hand. But he did not send a single one forward to help the uncertain issue of the attack. Informing Colvile that the attack had been checked and was likely to fail, he ordered him to keep his brigade in hand, so as to protect the Highland right and, if necessary, their retirement, or even the retirement of the whole force. This amazing communication was followed up by an order to proceed, not towards the scene of action, but due east towards the low bushy ridge. Beyond this he was not to advance. Leaving behind the Scots Guards, detached as divisional troops, Colvile advanced to the ridge, the two Coldstream battalions leading, well extended, with the Grenadiers in reserve. Both the leading battalions on arrival at the ridge reported a strong force of the enemy intrenched in front of them. The right of the Coldstreamers extended to within 2500 yards of the river, from which point the line was prolonged by the 9th Lancers and Mounted Infantry, who, under Babington's personal direction, had been making repeated attempts to force their way across the level but rough ground on the extreme right. On the left was a gap of a mile or more only partially covered by the Mounted Infantry. Soon after 6 A.M. Colvile was in-

Highlanders, but sends Guards off to the right.

formed that the Highland Brigade was holding its own but required the support of another battalion on its right to meet the reinforcements the Boers were bringing up. He accordingly withdrew the 2nd Coldstream and sent them with two companies of the 1st Coldstream more to the left, so as to close the gap, the two companies of the 1st Coldstream eventually replacing the 12th Lancers in the firing-line.

Yorkshire Light Infantry on right. Good work of cavalry Maxims.

About 9 A.M. Colonel Barter brought forward five companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry along the river bank, leaving three intrenched at Voetpad's Drift. Finding himself unable to drive the Boers out of their position at Moss Drift, Barter extended to his left so as to complete the British line on the east. Here the Yorkshiremen stayed all day, unable to make any progress but playing a useful part by the steadiness with which they checked the attempts of the Boers, especially of those across the river with Albrecht, to outflank the British position. The arrival of the infantry on the right wing enabled Babington to withdraw two squadrons and the Maxim detachment of the 9th Lancers from that flank and bring them round to support Hughes-Hallett, whose men were already showing signs of wavering before the steadily-reinforced fire of the Boers on the ridge opposite. The squadrons and some of the Mounted Infantry were afterwards sent round to the right again, but the Maxims of the 9th and 12th Lancers, under Lieutenants Allhusen and Macnaghten, remained all day alongside of G Battery, and shared with the horse gunners the credit of some of the best work done on a day of failure.

Possibility of breaking through Boer left,

The battle now became stationary. The attempts of the Highlanders to reach the trenches had long ago expended themselves, and they were only kept in their places by the steady support of the artillery. All along the centre the firing slacked off considerably, and was now most vigorous on the right, where the Coldstream battalions were fairly heavily engaged against the Boers on the opposite ridge. There can be little doubt, judging by the Boer accounts of the battle, that even now a determined advance anywhere along the right wing would have succeeded in breaking through the Boer line. For the Boer left, though reinforced some time

before by a strong body of Potchefstroomers, whom Cronje had brought round from the right wing as soon as he saw that the British advance along the railway had no serious intent, and by a steady stream of men from Brown's Drift, from the laagers on the east, and even from Spytfontein, was in considerable difficulties all the morning. It required all the exertions of the commandants to keep the burghers in their half-finished trenches or behind the imperfect shelter of the rocks and bushes. For such an advance Methuen had available the Gordons, Scots and Grenadiers, and with three untouched battalions much might still have been effected. Even apart from the prospect of defeating the Boer left a bolder policy was really required on that wing to enable Colvile to carry out the task assigned to him, and one cannot help feeling that the occasion would almost have justified Colvile in giving some latitude of interpretation to instructions issued before the situation was altogether defined. The event was soon to show that from their ridge the Guards could do nothing to prevent the Boers outflanking and driving in Hughes-Hallett's right.

Or of attacking heights from west. Methuen's only idea to hold on till night.

There was another alternative to an advance on the right which was perhaps equally feasible. On the left Pole-Carew had advanced his men on both sides of the railway to within about 1000 yards of the trenches, and made a demonstration against the Boer right. Failing any orders, beyond a message from Methuen to hold himself in readiness to reinforce the right, and in view of explicit instructions originally received not to endanger the safety of Modder River camp by advancing too far, that was as much as he could do. But there can be little doubt that if he had received orders to push on, and had been reinforced by another battalion, he could have effected a lodgment on the lower ridge immediately to the east of the railway. Once in command of that hill Pole-Carew could have enfiladed the whole of the centre trenches. But from the first Methuen never seems to have entertained the thought of taking any aggressive step to retrieve the failure of his first plan. His only idea, once he found that the Highlanders had neither taken the hill nor been driven back, was that his men should hold on all day long till

nightfall in front of the Boer trenches, in the hope that the Boers, as at Modder River, would get demoralised at night, and that a second night attack would prove successful. An order to that effect was sent to Hughes-Hallett as the senior officer in the Highland Brigade. Methuen can hardly have realised what he was asking the shaken and disorganised Highlanders to do; indeed after his own exaggerated language about Modder River the last thing one would have expected was an attempt to lay an even heavier strain upon the endurance of his men.

11 A.M. Methuen sends forward the Gordons.

Soon after 11 A.M. Methuen ordered forward six companies of the Gordons under Colonel Downman to support the Highland line opposite the centre of the Boer position, where it was already showing signs of weakening. In widely-extended lines the Gordons advanced by a series of orderly rushes under a fire that now broke out with renewed intensity. Passing through the rear of the scattered brigade, rallying and sweeping forward with them many waverers, they made a most gallant but useless attempt to charge the Boer position. More than 400 yards from the trenches the attack died away, many of the officers having fallen, and the Gordons remained lying down amid the scattered Highland Brigade. Their bravery was wasted, and in view of what followed soon after it would have been better if they had halted at 800 yards from the trenches, where they could have had a more steadying influence. The Howitzers now moved up to within 2500 yards of the trenches and began steadily pounding the Boer lines, especially the laager on the left of the main Magersfontein kopje and the horse lines in rear of the ridge. The direction of these was indicated by the balloon, which proved of considerable service during the day. The 75th Battery too about this time moved closer into the centre and took up a position in a line with, but some 600 yards to the right of, the other two batteries.

The strain on the Highlanders near the breaking-point.

The advance of the Gordons had given a temporary stimulus to the Highland Brigade, but it afforded no real relief from the strain to which they were subjected. And that strain was rapidly nearing the breaking-point. By half-past one nearly ten hours had passed since the first

awful catastrophe. For those ten hours the men had struggled and hung on in front of an impossible position, suffering casualties all the time and tortured by the burning African sun. They had long become convinced that no useful purpose could be served by their remaining exposed within easy range of the enemy, and the confusion of the various units and the loss of so many officers served to increase their unrest. All through the morning, by ones and twos, men had been creeping back from the firing-line. As yet there had been no general retirement, but it was imminent.

2 P.M. First retreat of the Highlanders.

On the right of the Highland Brigade the firing-line had been swaying backwards and forwards all the morning, and, in spite of the support of the Horse Artillery and the cavalry Maxims, had been finding it more and more difficult to maintain its position. Methuen had already, about the time that he ordered forward the Gordons to support the left of the brigade, sent word to Colvile to assist the right, but the latter had only managed to spare a few companies. About 1.30 P.M. the Boers, gallantly led by the burghers of Ficksburg, made a determined effort to enfilade the right of the Highlanders. Hughes-Hallett twice sent messengers to Colvile requesting that the Guards should be advanced to cover his flank. But the messages failed to reach their destination, and Hughes-Hallett found himself obliged to swing back his right. The movement instantly provoked a murderous fire, and the retirement originally ordered only for the two companies on the right began to communicate itself along the line. More than two miles away Downman, lying in the very front of the firing-line, saw the right come back, and, knowing that Hughes-Hallett was the acting brigadier, assumed that a general retirement of the brigade to less deadly range was intended. Like almost every other officer in the brigade he was quite unaware of the order Lord Methuen had sent to Hughes-Hallett to hang on till nightfall. He ordered the men near him to retire towards the guns. The movement spread quickly along the whole front of the brigade, and first in tens and then in hundreds the Highlanders rose up from the ground and began to come

back—at first in good order. But the storm of fire that burst out instantly from the trenches and the hill-side was too great even for the heroic exertions of the batteries to subdue, and a moment later the whole line streamed back helter-skelter across the open veld for the cover of the bushes and the guns. The losses in this retreat were terribly heavy, especially among those who had fought their way close up to the trenches in the early morning. Some small parties, indeed, were so far advanced that retreat was practically out of the question, and remained in their positions till dusk. Downman fell mortally wounded the moment he rose to retire. Captain E. B. Towse,* of the Gordons, with conspicuous gallantry, stayed by his wounded colonel's side till Sergeant Nelson and Lance-Corporal Hodgson came and helped to carry him back under the heavy fire.

3.45 P.M. Boer guns open fire. Second retreat of Highlanders. Collapse of the brigade.

Once the retreat began it was no easy matter to stop it, but gradually officers got their men together again, and Hughes-Hallett, Ewart, the brigade-major, and others set to work reforming the brigade. Rallying points were assigned to the different battalions about 1000 yards from the trenches, while orders were sent back for water-carts and food. But the Highland Brigade was now a complete wreck; the breaking strain had been passed, and physically and morally the men were completely unstrung. It was not long before this fact was made unpleasantly manifest. Except for the "pom-poms," the Boer field guns had given no sign of their existence all day. It would seem that the fire which the British batteries directed on the crest of the ridge with the first light of dawn and kept up ever since was so heavy that the Boer gunners never plucked up courage enough to go to their guns, and possibly Albrecht's absence on the south bank may have contributed to this astonishing lack of initiative. In any case, it was not till nearly 4 P.M. that they suddenly opened fire from the hill. Their first shells burst right over the midst of the Highlanders drawn up in the open. A moment later the brigade was seen dribbling away across the plain, helpless, unnerved, and utterly in-

* For his conduct on this occasion and subsequently at Mount Thaba, Captain Towse received the Victoria Cross.

different to the orders and reproaches of its officers. A partially successful attempt to rally the men was made a few hundred yards back, but the brigade as a whole was never properly reformed till after dusk. To Lord Methuen the first, and still more the second retreat of the Highlanders was a bitter disappointment. Up till then he had hoped to retrieve the day by another attack on the trenches at early dawn. This attack was to be carried out by Colvile with the Gordons, Grenadiers, and Scots, the last-mentioned of whom had been acting as escort to the artillery till they were sent forward after the first retreat of the Highlanders to take their place as a firing-line in front of the guns, while the rest of the troops remained in their places all night and acted as a containing force the next morning. It is just possible that, but for the unfortunate misunderstanding which brought about the first retreat, the Highlanders might have held on till nightfall. But it was more than could be expected of any troops. The best chance of assuring success for Methuen's plan would have lain in withdrawing the Highlanders to a safer range some hours before.

Close of the battle.

The rest of the day was spent in desultory skirmishing on the right flank, where the 9th Lancers had been especially persistent in their attempts to pierce the Boer lines a mile or so north of the river. But even there a deadlock gradually ensued along the whole line. The Howitzers and naval gun continued, more slowly than before, to drop shell among the Boer lines, occasionally a rifle cracked on one side or the other, but from 4 P.M. onwards the battle weakened and gradually died away. In many cases the men had gone to sleep from sheer exhaustion, and only woke up to find the sun setting and the battle over. But though a second night attack was out of the question, the troops were not allowed to abandon their positions. The shattered Highland Brigade was reformed behind Headquarter Hill, except a few companies left to cover the guns, its place being taken by the Scots. The rest of the Guards remained in their places, while the cavalry and guns were retired a short distance. Food and drink were at last brought out from the transport wagons, and after some slight rearrangement of dispositions

under cover of darkness, those who were not needed as sentries slept as they lay, with their rifles at their sides. While the weary soldiers slept the work of the Medical Corps was still at its height. All day long trainload after trainload of wounded had been despatched south from Modder River, and the work of collection and ministration was now even heavier than before, as the stretcher-bearers were at last able to push forward in search of the wounded to a distance that in daylight would have meant certain death. Even during the day officers and men of the Corps had exposed themselves fearlessly in the fire-swept zone, and it would be difficult to praise too highly the quiet courage and devotion shown by them in this as in other actions.*

Dec. 12. Methuen decides to retire to the camp.

At dawn General Colvile repaired to headquarters for instructions and found Lord Methuen inclined to order an immediate retirement on Modder River Camp. Colvile strongly urged the advisability of holding on in the hope that the Boers might yet abandon their positions, and Methuen concurred to the extent of sending his chief engineer with Colvile to select sites for field works. But at a council held an hour later, Methuen, finding the general opinion of his Staff in favour of retirement, reverted to his original intention and ordered a withdrawal at noon. The shock received by the Highland Brigade, the scantiness of gun ammunition,† and the difficulty of arranging the water supply at such a distance from the river, were the chief reasons for the decision which was perhaps the wisest under the circumstances, though the Boers have admitted since that their rifle ammunition had run so low that it is doubtful whether they could have held out for a second day's engagement.

Armistice by mutual consent. The retirement.

Ever since daybreak the Guards had been exchanging a brisk fire with the Boers opposite them, while the enemy's

* Lieut. H. E. M. Douglas, R.A.M.C., received the Victoria Cross for his gallantry on this occasion. The excellent organisation of the medical work by Colonel Townsend, his principal medical officer, was freely acknowledged by Lord Methuen in all his despatches.

† G Battery alone fired 1153 rounds during the day and the others scarcely less. So heavy indeed had the expenditure been recently that there were doubts whether there was sufficient reserve in the whole of South Africa to enable Methuen to be replenished immediately.

MAJOR-GENERAL A. J. WAUCHOPE. C.B., C.M.G.
COMMANDING HIGHLAND BRIGADE,
KILLED AT MAGERSFONTEIN.
From Photo by Horsburgh, Edinburgh.

"pom-poms" on the east opened on the cavalry as they moved forward from their bivouac. Between eight and nine the action promised to become general, when the report spread that an armistice had been concluded for the purpose of collecting the dead and any remaining wounded on both sides. All fire ceased at once, and shortly afterwards, in complete silence, the ambulances were seen moving forwards between the lines, each with its attendant company of stretcher-bearers, and the doctors from both the Boer and the British forces met outside the line of trenches. The armistice was a matter of mutual courtesy rather than of definite agreement. No general instructions were, in consequence, issued, and the naval gunners at the ganger's hut, seeing the Boers coming out of their trenches and suspecting some counter-stroke or flanking operation, unfortunately opened fire on them. In a moment the Boer guns on the ridge opened fire, selecting as their target G Battery, which stood completely exposed in the open. But the gunners remained perfectly steady, and clearly showed their intention of not replying, and Albrecht, who had crossed from Twee Rivier during the night and resumed command of the Boer guns, with some difficulty induced his men to cease firing. At midday the retirement began under cover of the guns. The Boers, beyond shelling the retiring troops, made no attempt to harass the withdrawal, and the Grenadiers, who were the last of the infantry to leave their positions, retired with almost ostentatious deliberation. The last event of the day was an earth-shaking salvo of lyddite from the Howitzers, and by 4 P.M. the rearguard of the column was back in camp.

Heavy losses of Highland Brigade.

The total casualties of the battle amounted to 971, including 23 officers and 182 men killed, 45 officers and 645 men wounded, and 76 men missing or prisoners, or about 7 per cent. of Methuen's force.* The mounted troops and

* The following casualties occurred amongst the officers:—Staff: killed, Major-Gen. Wauchope; wounded, Lieuts. Macleod, Wauchope, and Vaughan. 2nd Royal Highlanders: killed, Lieut.-Col. Coode, Capts. Elton, MacFarlan, and Hon. Cumming-Bruce, Lieuts. Edmonds and Ramsay; wounded, Majors Cuthbertson, Berkeley and Duff, Capt. Cameron, Lieuts. Harvey, Bertram, Tait, Bullock, Drummond and Innes. 2nd Seaforth Highlanders: killed, Major Mackenzie, Capts. Clark and Brodie,

Guards lost a certain number. Of the Mounted Infantry both Major Milton and Major Ray were killed, the former in a gallant and successful attempt to rally some of the broken Highlanders. Of the Coldstream battalions Major the Marquis of Winchester was killed and Colonel Codrington and Major Lambton wounded. But the great bulk of the losses fell on the Highland Brigade.* The unfortunate Highlanders lost 46 officers and 706 men killed and wounded, and of these casualties again by far the greater part fell on the two leading battalions, of whom the Seaforths lost 11 officers and 200 men, and the Black Watch 17 officers and 338 men, the latter figures giving a percentage of 60 per cent. among the officers and 37 per cent. among the men. The losses of the Highlanders, spread as they were over ten hours' fighting, are the best evidence of the strain to which the brigade at last succumbed. The Boer casualties, according to the Transvaal Identification Department, were about 250, including the Scandinavians, who lost 43 out of 50. The steadiness with which the Boers held their positions all day, practically without artillery support, is deserving of all praise.

Causes of controversy about Magersfontein.

Except perhaps Spion Kop there are few battles in this war that have provoked more embittered controversy than Magersfontein. The causes of the controversy are not far to seek. Lord Methuen's view was that the Highland Brigade

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Lieuts. Cox and Cowie; wounded, Capt. Fetherstonhaugh, Lieuts. Chamley, Waterhouse, Hall, Wilson, Clive and Baillie. 1st Highland Light Infantry: killed, Capts. Cowan and Lambton; wounded, Lieut.-Col. Kelham, Capts. Noyes, Wolfe-Murray and Richardson, Lieuts. Martin, Knight and Fraser. 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders: killed, Lieut.-Col. Goff and Lieut. King; wounded, Maj. Robinson, Capt. Campbell and Lieuts. Graham and Scott. 1st Gordon Highlanders: killed, Col. Downman, Capt. Wingate and Lieut. Campbell; wounded, Capts. Gordon and Macnab. 1st Coldstream Guards: wounded, Lieut.-Col. Codrington, Maj. Hon. W. Lambton, Capt. Sterling, Lieuts. Beckwith and Follett. 2nd Coldstream Guards: killed, Maj. the Marquis of Winchester. Cavalry Brigade: Staff—wounded, Capt. Briggs. Mounted Infantry: killed, Majors Milton and Ray; wounded, Lieut.-Col. Byron and Lieut. Cowie. Royal Horse Artillery: wounded, Maj. Maberley and Lieut. Tudor. Royal Army Medical Corps: wounded, Lieut. Douglas.

* Not including the Gordons, who lost 5 officers but only 39 men.

had failed him and that their failure was the sole cause of his defeat. They had stampeded, so he believed, at the first outbreak of fire, and when rallied had not even hung on passively till he could retrieve their failure by another attack. The Highlanders on their side considered that they had been sent into almost certain disaster, and that, instead of supporting them in their desperate attempts to retrieve that disaster, Lord Methuen had simply left them alone all day to beat themselves to pieces in an impossible frontal attack. It was inevitable under these circumstances that when Lord Methuen addressed the officers of the brigade on the following day, in a speech which, however kindly in its intentions and conciliatory in its language, still betrayed only too plainly the mistaken assumption underlying it, his words should arouse fierce resentment in the minds of high-spirited men smarting under a bitter sense of loss, shock, and undeserved humiliation. Feeling ran even higher at home, where the unfortunate but not unnatural misconceptions of the battle-field, crystallised in the letters of private officers or of press correspondents, were still further distorted by the most absurd and cruel rumours.*

The failure of the night attack.

But apart from these misconceptions it ought not to be impossible to obtain a clear idea of the causes of the failure at Magersfontein. The problem really falls into two parts: the failure of the night attack and the failure of the battle as a whole. A night attack is under any circumstances a dangerous and delicate operation. In this case the difficulty and danger were indefinitely increased, firstly, by the shell-fire on the 10th which warned the Boers and did away with the element of surprise; secondly, by Lord Methuen's ignorance of the projection of the line of the Boer trenches into the level beyond the foot of the hill and, thirdly, by the awful weather which necessitated the closest possible formation for the night march and made the column late in reaching its destination. The immediate cause of the

* *E.g.*, that Lord Methuen had, in spite of Wauchope's protests, insisted on the attack being delivered in quarter column, that Wauchope with his dying words fastened the blame on his chief, or that the Highlanders as a body showed disgraceful cowardice.

disaster was undoubtedly General Wauchope's mistake in not deploying till within 400 yards of the trenches. But so closely is this cause bound up with the preceding ones that it is difficult to attach any blame, anything more than a mere regret, to Wauchope's action. One may well imagine that if the Boers had not been on the alert, or else if they had not been several hundred yards further forward than was expected, the deployment would have taken place undisturbed. Again, if the march had not been so seriously delayed by the weather, it is probable that Wauchope would not have been so eager to push on as far as possible before deploying. And, in any case, one can hardly blame a British general, moving over practically unreconnoitred ground, for an error of a few hundred yards on a night in which the Boer commander, going from one part of his own lines to another, was so hopelessly lost that he all but strayed into the arms of the advancing British column. It is possible that the situation might yet have been saved if at the first burst of fire Wauchope had ordered the "Charge." Whether that be so or not Wauchope certainly showed courage and presence of mind, and his last orders went very near to retrieving the disaster.

Failure of the battle as a whole.

The defects of the plan of operations, of which the night attack on Magersfontein was to form the pivot, have already been dwelt on. Not the least was the absence of any provision for the contingency of failure. That defect was never remedied. Instead of concentrating all available troops to strike a blow which should retrieve the failure of the night attack, Lord Methuen simply used them to hold the lists while the Boer fire and the burning sun slowly but surely completed the demoralisation of the confused and leaderless Highland Brigade. There can be no surer sign of weak generalship than laying a severe strain upon, and running great risks with one part of an army while leaving another part inactive—than being forced into accepting the defeat of a section as the defeat of the whole. By this standard Magersfontein, and not only Magersfontein, but Ladysmith, Colenso, Spion Kop, stand equally condemned.

Methuen's march.

With Magersfontein ended Lord Methuen's march to the

relief of Kimberley. In spite of the serious deficiency in mounted troops the march had begun well, and Belmont and Enslin had been creditable not only to the soldiers who stormed the heights but to the general who planned the attack. But Modder River had been an unfortunate blunder, which only the steadiness and endurance of the troops had turned to victory. Lastly at Magersfontein the difficulties of the situation and the initial disaster seem to have paralysed the general's judgment and left him with no other idea but that of repeating the dogged tactics of Modder River under far more trying conditions. Lord Methuen was still, during two long years of campaigning, to show his energy and resourcefulness as a general and his high qualities as a leader of men, but there can be little doubt that at the moment his task was too much for him, as for many another.

The question of a retirement to Orange River.

After his return to Modder River camp Lord Methuen received a telegram from Sir R. Buller ordering him, unless he felt strong enough to venture another attack, to fall back to Orange River. Methuen at once called a council of war. The general opinion was decidedly in favour of retreating and arrangements were actually made for entraining the troops next morning. During the night, however, General Pole-Carew induced Methuen to defer the retreat in order to discuss the question once more in view of a scheme the former had drawn up for a turning movement by Jacobsdal. The particular scheme was rejected, but the retreat was again put off and eventually countermanded, fortunately for the future prospects of the campaign.

Effect of the battle in England.

At home the news of Magersfontein was received with a poignant sense of anguish and disappointment. Stormberg had been accepted, like Nicholson's Nek, as one of those unfortunate incidents inseparable from warfare with a mobile enemy. But this was very different. A British force of 13,000 men beaten on the open field with a loss of nearly 1000—small figures really, but how great they seemed to a generation that had not known serious war! Nowhere was the feeling more intense than in Scotland, where General Wauchope's death was felt as a personal bereavement by the whole nation. For it was not only among his soldiers that

"Andy" Wauchope's fearless courage and unwavering high principles had made him beloved, but wherever men had enjoyed the privilege of knowing his grave dignity and uncondescending sympathy. There could be no better instance of that universal popularity than the wave of non-political enthusiasm that once rocked almost to its fall the safest parliamentary seat in Great Britain. But profound as was the national sorrow and sense of defeat, another lesson yet was required before England even began to realise the task that faced her. At the moment the only step the Government took was to call out a seventh division. Meanwhile, all hopes centred on Sir Redvers Buller and the army of the Tugela. There neither numbers, generalship nor resolution would be lacking. There at least victory was certain.

CHAPTER XII

COLENSO

Buller in Natal. Assembly of Ladysmith Relief Force at Frere.

Sir Redvers Buller arrived in Maritzburg on the night of November 25. During the three days that he had been at sea the face of the war had been completely transformed. On the West, Methuen had won the victories of Belmont and Enslin, and was marching rapidly on to Kimberley; French was already busy pushing forward his patrols from Naauwpoort; Gatacre was moving his troops up from Queenstown to Putter's Kraal. In Natal the invading swarms which, when he so hastily took ship, enveloped Estcourt and Mooi River, and threatened instantly to swoop on Maritzburg, were now melting away like snow in thaw time. By sunrise next morning they had vanished, and all the British camps, reviving from the chilly spell that had numbed them, were on the move to Frere. Only the task of relieving Ladysmith remained, and the Boers would disappear behind the Drakensberg and the Buffalo as they were now disappearing behind the Tugela. To that task Sir R. Buller set himself, little doubting but that before Christmas it would be accomplished, Natal clear of the Boers, and he himself free to return and resume the suspended march to Bloemfontein—as he had promised the Government when he left Cape Town. But, however confident of the issue, Buller foresaw that the Boers would not relax their grip on Ladysmith without a determined struggle, and he was resolved to complete every preparation to ensure success before taking the field. So sending General Clery up to Frere to superintend the organisation of the large field force collecting there, he himself stayed at Maritzburg and devoted the next week to the perfecting of transport, supply and hospital arrange-

ments—especially solicitous about the last. A corps of Colonial Scouts, started a few days before at General Hildyard's suggestion, was also raised and soon numbered about 500 men. On December 5 Buller went up to Frere, followed in the next few days by the last contingents of the force destined for the relief of Ladysmith. The force at Frere now consisted of four brigades of infantry: Hildyard's, Barton's, Lyttelton's, and Hart's;* a mounted brigade under Lord Dundonald, comprising, besides the Royal Dragoons and 13th Hussars from England, some 1300 mounted infantry, made up of the mounted troops previously at Estcourt and Mooi River, strengthened by two squadrons of the newly-raised South African Light Horse sent round from Cape Town; five field batteries (7th, 14th, 64th, 66th and 73rd), and two 4·7 and 12-pounder naval guns from Durban. The whole of the field artillery was put under Colonel Long, who had commanded the artillery at Omdurman, while the naval contingent was under Captain E. P. Jones of H.M.S. *Forte*. In all there were at Frere by December 10 nearly 18,000 men, while another 2000–3000† were on the line of communications. The railway bridge at Frere had been repaired by the 8th, and all was ready for the advance.

The Boers behind the line of the Tugela.

Meanwhile the enemy had not been idle behind the Tugela. General Joubert, indeed, had returned from the Estcourt expedition so seriously ill that he was obliged to take train for Pretoria almost at once. But his injury proved no loss to the Boer cause, for it resulted in the command of the force left at Colenso being temporarily entrusted to Louis Botha. After a krygsraad held by Joubert on his way through Modder Spruit on December 1, a further 3000 men were sent down to Colenso on the 2nd, and by the 10th Botha had nearly 8000 men available to hold the line of the Tugela against Buller's advance. That line, from the Drakensberg to the junction of the Buffalo, was over 100 miles in length,

* To complete this brigade the Irish Rifles, which had remained with Gatacre, were replaced by the Border Regiment, while the 1st Dublin Fusiliers, left on the line of communications, were replaced by the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers.

† 1st Dublin Fusiliers, Somerset Light Infantry, Durban Light Infantry, Imperial Light Infantry.

though, owing to the limitations of the British transport and the difficult character of the country on both flanks of the line, only about 60 miles of it came seriously into consideration. The river, fordable, except during freshets, at drifts every few miles, was not in itself a very formidable barrier, but it limited the points of attack, acted as a delay which would give the defenders time to take up positions behind it, and in some places could be utilized as part of the line of defences. For this last purpose only the ten miles or so from the junction of the Little Tugela to Colenso village were really well adapted. There the south bank slopes down to the river everywhere in open undulating downs, completely dominated by the lofty hills which line the northern bank. Above that the river winds in and out among the heights on both banks, while east of Colenso, where it flows north and north-eastwards in deep gorges, edging up towards Ladysmith, the southern bank for some distance dominates the northern, while on both sides the grass-grown hills and open veld are replaced by rocky ridges and broken ground intersected by dongas and covered with bush and stunted trees—the bush country of eastern Natal. But neither the length of line to be defended nor the weak points in it caused much anxiety to Botha and his commandants, who entertained no doubt but that the British would advance directly along the railway and attempt to force their way into Ladysmith by the straightest road. With this conviction they set busily to work intrenching and perfecting their position—already of great natural strength—astride of the river and railway at Colenso, detaching only small patrols to watch the upper and lower course of the river.

Futile British reconnaissances. Lack of information.

Since Lord Dundonald's reconnaissance of November 28 three more reconnaissances had been made by the British on December 3rd, 6th and 8th without adding anything further to the information gleaned on that occasion. These reconnaissances, the last two of which were personally accompanied by Sir R. Buller, were simply made over the open ground in front of Colenso, or slightly to the west of it, in the hope of drawing the Boer artillery fire. But the Boers, who on November 28 had probably only fired because they were not yet sure in their positions, had no mind to disclose themselves now, and

the reconnaissances showed nothing that could not be seen from anywhere on the right bank. Reconnaissances to test the flanks of the position, if possible by crossing the Tugela, were not attempted. Nor was there any adequate effort made to ascertain the Boer position by the use of spies or scouts. Sketches of the hills were drawn by some Engineer officers and ranges taken, but practically no attempt was made to find out anything about the river itself or what lay behind, though there were dozens of young officers who would have given a quarter's pay to be allowed to swim the Tugela at night and crawl over the Boer positions. The failure to realise the value of information which pervaded the whole army system was shown no less strikingly by the fact that south of Ladysmith the country had never been adequately mapped at all. The Intelligence Department at Maritzburg had compiled a map from farm surveys and other available sources immediately before the war. That was shut up in Ladysmith, but another, showing the country about Colenso at an inch to a mile, had been hurriedly compiled since, and was issued to commanding officers before the battle.

Alternative ways round Boer position. Buller decides to go by the Upper Tugela.

But even without full information the formidable character of the Colenso position and of the positions between it and Ladysmith was evident to any one who saw, even at a distance, the frowning barrier of hills, or who studied the character of the country on the most general map. Sir R. Buller realised it after his reconnaissances, and came to the conclusion that Colenso was impregnable to a frontal attack and that it would be necessary to turn the position by a wide flanking march, a conclusion he forthwith communicated to the War Office. It was a conclusion which already commended itself on strategical grounds. A flank march might enable Buller to strike a blow at the Boer lines of communication behind Ladysmith and thus break up the main Boer force in Natal, a far more important object than the mere entry into Ladysmith. Two possible lines of advance then presented themselves to the General. One was to march eastwards through Weenen, cross the Tugela at the wagon drift thirty miles below Colenso, and then make straight for the railway at Elandslaagte. The other was to

march to one of the drifts on the Upper Tugela, seize the commanding heights to the north and from there strike at the Free State communications. The Weenen expedition offered by far the greatest rewards for success. The main Boer army at that date was still immobile and dependent on the railway to an extent that subsequent Boer exploits have somewhat caused to be lost sight of, and there can be little doubt that if Buller could have got within striking distance of the railway he would not only have broken up and dispersed the Transvaal forces, but would have secured most of the guns on Pepworth, Lombard's Kop, and Bulwana, and the supplies in the laager at Modder Spruit. As regards feasibility, the hilly and bushy character of the country, and the distance of the Weenen route from the Boer positions, increased the chances of the manœuvre being carried out in secrecy—especially if any adequate attempt had been made to use the mounted troops to screen the right bank of the Tugela—while the great northward bend of the Tugela east of Colenso and the roughness of the country made it difficult for the Boers to get round in time to dispute the passage, and somewhat compensated for the slowness of an infantry force. In fact it was just possible, if a really vigorous feint were made upon the Colenso position, or, better still, some point west of it, that Buller's cavalry might be almost on the railway before the Boers realised what was happening. But the Weenen route also presented grave difficulties. It meant a march of over sixty miles, a very serious problem for the transport, though Yule's retreat had shown that it was not insuperable. From the Tugela to within a few miles of the railway the road led through the roughest of bush country. It was the prospect of fighting his way with a long convoy and little spare food through twenty miles of this country, swarming with Boers who could take up a new position at every step, that led Buller to dismiss the scheme as impracticable. But considerable as the risks were, they were not comparable to those that great generals have at all times taken to achieve great objects. Buller preferred the seemingly less venturesome course. The western route had the advantage of nearness, for, once in

possession of the heights across the river, Buller would be separated from Ladysmith and from the Harrismith Railway by nothing more than fifteen miles or so of open rolling veld, and could either attempt to cut off the Free Staters on the west of Ladysmith, or, in conjunction with Sir G. White, endeavour to destroy the force now at Colenso. The chief drawback to this route was the difficulty of concealing the march from the Boers, who, owing to the winding of the Tugela, were on inner lines, and could reach Vaalkrantz or Spion Kop in three or four hours. Still Buller may very well have considered an attack on these open heights preferable to the prospect of making his way through a maze of rocky bush-clad kopjes, in which it would be extremely difficult to keep control of his men, and the operation offered the prospect of great, though not of the greatest, results.

Dec. 12. Buller suddenly changes his plans and decides to attack Colenso directly.

On December 11 orders were issued for an advance by Springfield on the Little Tugela to Potgieter's Drift. At dawn on the 12th, Barton's brigade, with two 4·7 and six 12-pounder naval guns, were sent off to the rise since known as Gun Hill, 7000 yards in front of Colenso village, to play the part of a containing force, while the rest of the army made ready for the march. Suddenly that same evening Sir R. Buller changed his mind, abandoned the whole plan, and decided to make a direct attack upon the Boer position at Colenso. The difficulties of the transport problem, and the fear of exposing his line of communications, may already have inclined him to waver in his purpose. But the determining moment seems to have been Methuen's defeat at Magersfontein. For the last fortnight Buller had left his generals in Cape Colony largely to themselves, and had tended to sink his position as Commander-in-Chief in that of director of the Ladysmith Relief Force.* The news of two

* The fiction that Clery commanded in Natal, and that Buller—who, it is worth noting, had no staff with him except Colonel Stopford and a few A.D.C.'s—was only present on a short visit of inspection, was, indeed, outwardly kept up, and was maintained in the orders issued before Colenso. But in reality Buller directly commanded the force. If it had been otherwise, he might very well have ordered Clery to carry out the movement by Potgieter's Drift, and remained behind himself to keep in touch with Cape Colony.

disasters, Stormberg and Magersfontein, following so close upon each other was a heavy blow to him, and he may well have in part ascribed the failures of his subordinates to the absence of his direct control. By a march to the Upper Tugela he ran some risk of being cut off from all communication with the outer world for several days, and, in the critical state of affairs in Cape Colony, that was a risk from which he, as Commander-in-Chief, shrank. It was a fatal conclusion to draw. The one important thing now was to make sure of victory in Natal; the one clear lesson of Methuen's and Gatacre's reverses was that victory was no easy matter—attainable by a second best plan—but that it could only be secured by the utmost skill and the utmost effort. But from the first Buller had been curiously slow to grasp the essence of the military situation, namely, that the Boers were more formidable in the field than had ever been suspected, and the last disasters taught him no more than White's failure and the confusion in Natal had taught him a month before. Nor did he possess the strength of purpose necessary to enable him to postpone all non-strategic considerations to the one consideration of victory. It was not a mere coincidence, perhaps, but a symptom that White before the battle of Ladysmith, Methuen before Modder River and Magersfontein, Gatacre before Stormberg, and Buller before Colenso, should in each case first have decided on the better and safer plan, and then, through hesitations and doubts of various kinds, have gravitated fatally towards the worse.

The Colenso position.

Seen from the south the hills behind Colenso resemble a great semi-circular amphitheatre, six miles in diameter, with sides rising from 500–1000 feet above the arena, across which the Tugela winds in a series of intricate curves. These windings form two main loops. Inside the eastern of these loops, and on the right or south bank of the river, lie the railway station, goods-shed, and handful of scattered houses which make up the village of Colenso. From Colenso to Chieveley, six miles away, the right bank slopes upwards in gentle, smooth undulations. But north of the village, across the river, the ground is broken into ridge after ridge of low kopjes, like waves of a choppy sea, through which the

railway winds its course to disappear through a tortuous gap in the seemingly unbroken crescent of hills behind. These ridges, the "Colenso kopjes" as they were always called afterwards, stretch down to the very bank of the river. The most prominent is Fort Wylie, lying immediately to the east of the railway bridge. To the left of the village across the western side of the loop runs the old iron road bridge across the Tugela—then still intact. The western horn of the amphitheatre comes down to within a few hundred yards of the river, and at its foot are two farms (H. and E. Robinson's), the eastern one backed by a long line of tall gum-trees, a conspicuous object against the bare hill-side. Several watercourses cross the arena of the amphitheatre, the largest of these, the Onderbroek Spruit and Langverwacht Spruit, running in an easterly direction, and forming deep kloofs or gullies invisible from the southern bank. In the centre the ground rises gradually from the undulating plain on the left bank in terrace on terrace to the flat-topped heights of Grobelaar's Hill and Onderbroek Mountain. The eastern horn ends in a bold hill, Hlangwane, in the dark line of bushes at whose foot the eye imagines it can follow the eastward course of the Tugela. But herein lies the surprise of the Colenso position. For a mile and a half east of the railway bridge, almost to the foot of Hlangwane, the line of bushes truly denotes the course of the river. But beyond that it merely marks one of the many dongas that intersect the surface of the country. The Tugela itself doubles back suddenly to west and north, feeling its way along the inner curve of Hlangwane for nearly three miles before, tumbling over mighty falls, it can escape eastwards again through the same gap that lets out the railway. A quarter of the seeming amphitheatre is thus cut off from the rest by the river. And seen from within, from the lower slopes of Grobelaar's or from the Langverwacht Spruit, the semblance of an amphitheatre disappears, and Hlangwane stands up as the western flank of a great square bastion of heights, girt round their base by the Tugela, and everywhere commanding the lower kopjes on the left bank.

Boer preparations for its defence.

Such was the position which, for the last fortnight, the

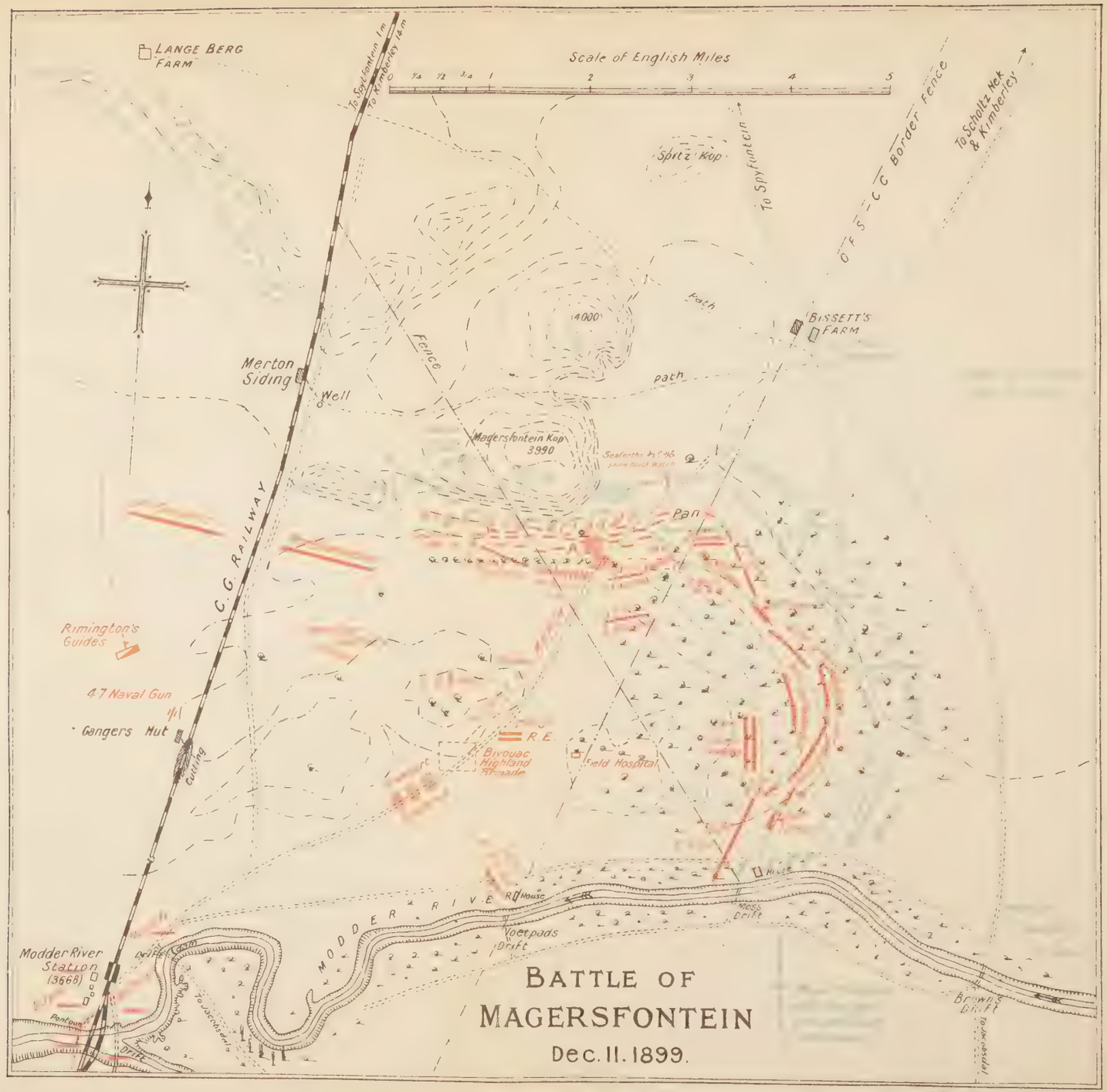
Boers had been busily strengthening. In front its strength now left little to be desired. The right bank everywhere offered a perfect field of fire. The river, unfordable except at five or six points * along the front, formed the first line of defence. But it was here used in the ordinary way as an impediment to the attack, and not, like the Riet at Modder River, as a shelter trench, a purpose for which the more irregularly shelving banks and the undulations of the ground in front hardly lent themselves. No attempt was made anywhere to line the right bank, and in many places the line of defences was several hundred yards away from the river altogether. Botha's expressed wish was that the British should be allowed to get as near the river as possible, and even begin crossing before the Boers should open fire upon them. Observation posts had been established, and slight defences thrown up here and there, in case they were wanted, as far up as the junction of the Little Tugela. But the Boer right properly began at the wagon drift opposite H. Robinson's farm. The section of the defences along the front of the heights from here to E. Robinson's farm was manned by the Free State contingent under A. P. Cronje, strengthened by Ben Viljoen's Johannesburgers. East of this, on the day of the battle, the Zoutpansberg, Swaziland and Ermelo commandos under the General's brother, Christian Botha, occupied an almost continuous line of shelter extending for about a mile towards the head of the first big loop of the river, and formed by a long trench at the foot of the row of trees already mentioned, and by a previously existing stone wall. At the head of the loop several deep dongas converging

* A wagon drift six miles west of Colenso just above the right flank of the position where a road led up a valley to join the main road from Colenso to Ladysmith, a bridle drift opposite Robinson's Farm, another a mile lower down above the junction of a large watercourse on the right bank known as the Doornkop Spruit, then a sinuous four miles of deep water to the wagon drift just below the road bridge, and two drifts on each side of the railway bridge. At the head of the western loop, and half a mile above the road bridge, the map indicated so-called "pont drifts," *i.e.*, deep still reaches crossed by a ferry-boat. The boats, if in use at that time, had certainly been removed before the battle, but the name pont drift may possibly have helped to mislead General Hart in the battle, and may perhaps account for the legend of the Boers having dammed the river.

to the river afforded excellent cover, and a screened approach from the folds of the ground further back. These dongas and a sharp little bluff immediately above the river bank needed little improvement to make them enormously strong. This position was held by the Ermelo and Standerton burghers and by some of the Middelburg commando. From this point eastward for about a mile and a half there were no trenches except round a small kraal strongly held by the Middelburgers. But the unfordable river in front, and the power of directing a cross-fire from either flank on to the open plain, were a sufficient protection for this section of the defence. The centre of the position, on which the main Boer force was massed, was formed by the Colenso kopjes. These were seamed with trenches, the lowest tier cut in the very bank of the river, with loop-holes pierced through it, the highest a hundred feet above. West of the railway the kopjes were held by the Middelburg, Heidelberg and Boksburg commandos, and the Johannesburg Police, while Vryheid and Krugersdorp were intrenched on Fort Wylie. Four or five field guns and "pom-poms," the bulk of Botha's weak artillery, were also concentrated on the kopjes. Of the other guns three were placed so as to command the big western loop, one just above the row of trees, a second in the very centre of the position where the Onderbroek Spruit emerges from the deep gorge known as Grobelaar's Kloof, and the third, a 5-inch Howitzer, between the two on the eastern shoulder of the flat-topped hill, usually called Red Hill, nearly 700 feet above the river. Lastly, one of the 6-inch Creusots was posted on a rise near the railway, 3000–4000 yards north of the Colenso kopjes. The bulk of the laagers were well in rear, mostly along the Onderbroek Spruit, one of the largest being fully five miles north-west of Colenso, where a considerable reserve was kept available either for reinforcing the main position or for galloping round to check a turning movement on the west. In the unlikely event of the British forcing their way across the river, the Onderbroek Spruit and the towering heights behind offered a good second line of defence. Against a frontal attack the Colenso position seemed almost impregnable.

DIRECTIONS

- ..... British Infantry
- ..... British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry
- ..... Boers
- ..... Artillery
- A ..... Highland Brigade at moment of surprise



But even this great position had its weak point. From Fort Wylie back to the Langverwacht Spruit the whole of the defences could be enfiladed or taken in reverse from the right bank of the Tugela. To prevent this it was essential to occupy Hlangwane, on the British side of the river, and up to December 13 Hlangwane was held by the Zoutpansberg and Boksburg commandos. But this entailed a most awkward splitting up of the force. There was a drift west of Hlangwane and another north of it, just below the falls, and the Boers had supplemented these by a rough bridge made of railway sleepers and a wire cable with a traveller near the junction of the Langverwacht Spruit. But anything like rapid reinforcement of the Hlangwane position or rapid retreat from it were alike out of the question, while it might be entirely cut off for days by a sudden rise of the river. Nor did Hlangwane lend itself well to defence. The ground in front of it, though not exactly favouring infantry attack, was more broken and bush-covered than anywhere else along the position. On the east, where the drainage flows away from the Tugela towards the Blaauwkrantz, the Gomba Spruit and its tributaries offered a means of approach completely screened from the main Boer position, while across the Gomba the hill was confronted by excellent artillery positions. So forcibly indeed did the precariousness of this isolated position strike the Boers on Hlangwane that the mere sight of Barton's brigade proved too much for their courage. They recrossed the Tugela on the morning of the 13th, and all Botha's persuasion was powerless to induce them to return. In this quandary the young general telegraphed to Joubert at Pretoria, hoping to get some reply that would impress the burghers more than his own comparative inexperience. Kruger, Joubert and Meyer at once held a council of war, at which the two latter, who knew the Colenso district well, expressed their agreement with Botha's view as to the vital importance of Hlangwane. But even their reply that the position was to be reoccupied at all costs seemed at first to have no effect, and it was not till the evening of the 14th, after drawing of lots, that the Wakkerstroom burghers, joined by volunteers from other commandos,

Boers evacuate and then reoccupy Hlangwane. Dec. 13–15.

consented to undertake the task. At 3 A.M. on the 15th, an hour before the first British troops marched out of camp to the battle of Colenso, Hlangwane was reoccupied by a force of about 800 Boers.

Inadequacy of Boer force on Hlangwane. Its explanation.

Botha deserves every credit for his determination in insisting that Hlangwane should be held. But it cannot be said that the force sent over was even now adequate to the importance of the position.* A much smaller force would probably have sufficed to hold the almost impregnable river front, while a larger force on Hlangwane would not only have made sure the key to the position, but would, if occasion offered, have been able to deliver an effective counter-attack. The true explanation, unquestionably, is that Botha never for a moment doubted but that the main British attack would be directed straight against the Colenso kopjes, and only feared that if Hlangwane were entirely unoccupied some detachment on the British flank might be tempted to seize it, and might then realise its importance. Nothing indeed, at this stage of the war, is more astonishing than the contempt the Boer generals showed for their opponents, except the fact that that contempt was almost invariably justified by the event. Besides deciding the vital question of Hlangwane, Botha was busy during these last few days encouraging his men, many of whom were by no means pleased at the prospect of meeting the redoubtable British Commander-in-Chief. It was not only the confidence felt in Buller by the British, but also the memory of some of his gallant exploits in the Zulu War which still lingered among the older men, that helped to create the apprehension with which the Boers awaited his onset. Strict orders were issued to the doctors to suppress the practice, very frequent in the laagers, of shamming sickness to escape duty in the trenches. Above all, Botha was anxious to impress on his artillery and on his burghers the necessity of not disclosing their positions till the real attack began.

* At a later date the Boers kept fully half their force across the river on Hlangwane and the adjoining heights, from which they were only driven in February 1900 after nearly a week's fighting.

Barton's advance on the 12th met with no opposition, though the Boers could be seen moving rapidly about in considerable numbers on the other side of the river, and the guns were placed in position to open the bombardment the next day. At 7.15 on the morning of the 13th the first naval gun opened, and for three hours the Colenso kopjes were bombarded with common shell and lyddite. The shelling produced little visible effect. One trench, half way down the face of one of the kopjes, so plainly visible that it was probably a dummy, suffered considerably, great gaps being made in the parapet. The real trenches, along the crest lines of the kopjes and along the river banks, were so skilfully made as to be invisible at long range and escaped almost unscathed. Small parties of the enemy rode carelessly to and fro, and occasionally a shell would dislodge a few from one trench to bolt like rabbits into another. That was all that the cannonade revealed of the enemy's dispositions. That same day Lyttelton's and Hart's brigades marched out from Frere and pitched their camps on the west side of the railway near the Doornkop Spruit and somewhat in front of Gun Hill, and the next day they were followed by headquarters and the rest of the force. On the 14th the naval battery advanced to a small kopje west of the line, 3000 yards nearer Colenso, and again bombarded the enemy's position all the morning and afternoon. But the enemy lay closer than ever. During the night they had repaired the breaches made in their trenches by the lyddite, and even during the day they went on at intervals with the work of perfecting their shelters. But so little did they betray their presence that in the British army the suspicion already began to lurk in some men's minds that the position had been evacuated. Even the general, who spent a good part of the day near the naval guns examining the enemy's positions, was apparently, to judge by his dispositions, affected by the peaceful silence of those harmless-looking hillocks and bare mountain sides. He had come to Chieveley in the full expectation of heavy fighting, but, like Methuen at Modder River, he seems at the last moment to have let the delusive testimony of his own eyes override his first conviction.

Dec. 13–14. Boer position shelled without provoking any reply.

The two armies on the eve of the battle.

That night the two armies lay four miles apart, with the river between them. The British camp seemed almost to invite the fire of the enemy's long-range guns, for so open was it that every tent and gun could have been counted from the heights behind Colenso. Buller certainly was making no attempt to conceal his intention of attacking Colenso. It was as if he wished to impress the enemy with the irresistible strength of his force. And there were few officers or men in the camp who, looking round on the many splendid regiments and batteries of deep-throated guns there assembled, doubted but that the next few days would see Colenso occupied and Ladysmith relieved. Over against them the enemy, motionless and invisible in their trenches, waited in dour patience for the attack. As at Magersfontein, the last two days' shelling had not only warned them of the impending advance but had given them confidence in the security of their defences and in the harmlessness of artillery fire—a point on which they were already reassured by a special message from Cronje. Relieved of all fear of the much-vaunted lyddite, they confidently trusted in their Mausers to check any attempt to cross the river. The only apprehension they still felt was that the British might cross the river unawares and get into their trenches by a night attack—a very unlikely contingency, but one that at that time still had great terror for the Boers.

Buller's plan of attack.

In the evening Buller called his senior officers together, announced that he was going to attack Colenso next morning, and briefly explained his plan. The previous description of the Colenso position has shown that, while enormously strong in front, it was weaker on its flanks, especially on its left, where it was completely cut in two by the river. The obvious method of dealing with it, therefore, was to begin by an attack on the isolated left wing, in other words to seize Hlangwane and its northern continuation. If the Boers on Hlangwane determined to resist the attempt Buller could concentrate practically his whole force on them, and enjoy the rare opportunity of overwhelming his enemy in detail in a position where reinforcement or retreat were alike difficult. If not, the mere occupation of the hill would, without further

fighting, suffice to make the Colenso position untenable, and force the Boers to fall back on a second line. Assisted by the possession of a bridge-head across the river at Colenso, Buller could then pierce this second line somewhere opposite the Falls under cover of artillery fire from the heights on the right bank. When that was achieved he would be almost in touch with White. A possible alternative to seizing Hlangwane might have been to force the passage of the Tugela at the wagon drift on the extreme right of the Boer position and seize the heights forming the western horn of the amphitheatre of hills. This move, if successful, would equally have forced the Boers to abandon Colenso, and would have provided a starting-point for the outflanking or seizure of the heights across the Onderbroek Spruit. Neither of these plans commended themselves to Sir R. Buller; it is difficult to believe, in view of his actions, that the move by Hlangwane can even have occurred to him. The plan he now set forth was for a simple frontal attack on the Boer trenches, the very thing he had declared impossible a few days before. Hildyard's brigade was to fight its way across the river straight opposite the Colenso kopjes; Hart was to cross at the bridle drift just above the junction of the Doornkop Spruit, and move down the left bank to enfilade the Colenso kopjes from the west, while Dundonald, with the greater part of the mounted men, was to take a field battery round to the slopes of Hlangwane and enfilade them from the east. The remaining two infantry brigades, Lyttelton's and Barton's, were to be in reserve, covering the gaps between the centre and the wings, so as to be able rapidly to reinforce either of the two main points of attack, or Dundonald, if the latter should get into a difficulty. The essence of the plan was the attack in the centre. As for Hart's attack, which was to be developed before Hildyard's, it would, if unsuccessful, still serve its purpose by containing the Boers on that flank. To Dundonald's movement Buller did not attach any particular importance. The great thing in his view was to secure a lodgment on the left bank under Fort Wylie; once there his men would be under cover, and shell-fire and the want of water would in time turn the Boers out of the rest of the

Colenso kopjes.* The force was to bivouac in Colenso village for the night. His officers accepted the plan without discussion. Such was the confidence they felt in Sir R. Buller, that, however inwardly surprised some of them may have been, they never doubted for a moment but that their general had sufficient reasons for his decision.

The detailed orders for the battle.

At 10 P.M. the following detailed orders were issued by Sir C. F. Clery, still nominally in command of the South Natal Field Force:—

1. The enemy is entrenched in the kopjes north of Colenso Bridge. One large camp is reported to be near the Ladysmith Road, about five miles north-west of Colenso. Another large camp is reported in the hills which lie north of the Tugela in a northerly direction from Hlangwane Hill.

2. It is the intention of the General Officer Commanding to force the passage of the Tugela to-morrow.

3. The 5th Brigade will move from its present camping-ground at 4.30 A.M. and march towards the Bridle Drift, immediately west of the junction of Dornkop Spruit and the Tugela. The Brigade will cross at this point, and after crossing move along the left bank of the river towards the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

4. The 2nd Brigade will move from its present camping-ground at 4 A.M., and passing south of the present camping-ground of No. 1 and No. 2 Divisional Troops, will march in the direction of the iron bridge † at Colenso. The Brigade will cross at this point, and gain possession of the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

5. The 4th Brigade will advance at 4.30 A.M. to a point between Bridle Drift and the railway, so that it can support either the 5th or the 2nd Brigade.

* This is the explanation given in Sir R. Buller's despatch, but it is difficult to see why the Boers could not, on their side, have remained under cover behind the reverse of the kopjes, fetching their water supply from the Tugela on their left or from the Onderbroek Spruit, a mile in rear.

† There were two iron bridges at Colenso, more than half a mile apart, *viz.*, the road bridge to the west of the village and the railway bridge to the north of it. The former was the one commonly spoken of as the "iron bridge," but it is quite clear from Sir R. Buller's description of what he intended Hildyard to do that "iron bridge" in these orders meant the railway bridge. The vagueness of the description is characteristic.

6. The 6th Brigade (less a half battalion escort to baggage) will move at 4 A.M. east of the railway in the direction of Hlangwane Hill to a position where he can protect the right flank of the 2nd Brigade, and, if necessary, support it or the mounted troops referred to later as moving towards Hlangwane Hill.

7. The Officer Commanding Mounted Brigade will move at 4 A.M. with a force of 1000 men and one battery of No. 1 Brigade Division in the direction of Hlangwane Hill; he will cover the right flank of the general movement, and will endeavour to take up a position on Hlangwane Hill, whence he will enfilade the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

The Officer Commanding mounted troops will also detail two forces of 300 and 500 men to cover the right and left flanks respectively and protect the baggage.

8. The 2nd Brigade Division, Royal Field Artillery, will move at 4.30 A.M., following the 4th Brigade, and will take up a position whence it can enfilade the kopjes north of the iron bridge. This Brigade Division will act on any orders it receives from Major-General Hart.

The six Naval guns (two 4·7-inch and four 12-pounder), now in position north of the 4th Brigade, will advance on the right of the 2nd Brigade Division, Royal Field Artillery.

No. 1 Brigade Division, Royal Field Artillery (less one battery detached with Mounted Brigade), will move at 3.30 A.M. east of the railway and proceed under cover of the 6th Brigade to a point from which it can prepare the crossing for the 2nd Brigade.

The six Naval guns now encamped with No. 2 Divisional Troops will accompany and act with this Brigade Division.

9. (Detailed orders for disposition of baggage in readiness to move to Colenso.)

10. The position of the General Officer Commanding will be near the 4·7-inch guns.

The Commanding Royal Engineer will send two sections, 17th Company, Royal Engineers, with the 5th Brigade, and one section and headquarters with the 2nd Brigade.

11. Each infantry soldier will carry 150 rounds on his person, the ammunition now carried in the ox wagons of regimental transport being distributed. Infantry greatcoats will be carried in two ox wagons of regimental transport, if brigadiers so wish; other stores will not be placed in these wagons.

Criticism of Buller's plan.

The most striking feature of these orders, perhaps, is

the meagreness of the information they convey about the enemy's dispositions. Reading them as they stand, one might almost conclude that in Sir R. Buller's conception of his plan the Colenso kopjes marked the whole extent of the Boer position. Is it possible that this really was the case? If so the tactical scheme at once becomes, if not brilliant, at any rate intelligible. Colenso was in that case meant to be an enveloping attack carried out simultaneously in front and on both flanks. But the supposition is an almost impossible one. Inadequate as Sir R. Buller's information was, and insufficient as were the means used to secure it, he cannot have been unaware of the presence of the Boers as far up as, and beyond, the drift Hart was to cross, and in fact the possibility of Hart's being checked entered into his calculations. As regards Hlangwane, his scouts had for the past fortnight reported it held, and it is very doubtful if any information of the temporary abandonment reached Buller. And even if he had had no information he could hardly have assumed that the Boers, who in every larger engagement hitherto had taken up the most extended positions, would now attempt to defend the passage of a river by massing all their force at one point. The most that can be admitted is that Buller believed, and with good reason, that the flanks of the position were considerably weaker than the centre. The plan then resolves itself into a frontal attack directed on three separate points of an insufficiently reconnoitred position held in unknown strength by an intrenched enemy, a position sheltered along the greater part of its front by a broad river believed to be fordable at two or three points only, and resting on its left on a high rocky hill. The two main attacks were to take place across absolutely open ground. There was to be no attempt to save the troops either by getting down to the river under cover of darkness and crossing in the grey light of morning, or by working up to the position by a series of intrenchments. Against any enemy, at any period since the introduction of the rifle, such tactics would have been difficult to justify. After the experience of Modder River, the written report on which battle must already have been in Buller's

hands, and after the last revelations of Boer fighting power, they were almost inconceivable. Whether, undeterred by the fate of others, Buller still believed at heart that a force of British infantry such as his could "do anything and go anywhere," or whether, on the contrary, he was so bewildered by the terrible responsibility of his position and by the paralysing intangibility of the enemy as to be unable to think out any better plan, it is impossible to say. Whatever the true psychological explanation of the plan for the attack on Colenso, the fact remains that a worse plan could not have been devised. Only by a miracle of good fortune could it hope to succeed. Nor can it even be urged that the dangers of the dispersed frontal attack were compensated by the exceptional rewards that would have accompanied success. On the contrary, the army would only have found itself in the pit of the Colenso amphitheatre, cramped in between the Tugela and the heights, and face to face with a series of positions which, as the events of February 23–27, 1900, showed, could only be overcome by moving the main body of the force back across the Tugela again.

White not informed of the intended attack.

There is one other point of interest in connection with Sir R. Buller's decision to attack Colenso on December 15. He had previously announced to Sir G. White by heliograph that he would attack on the 17th, and the latter made arrangements to have a force ready to sally out and help the advance. But when the attack was fixed for the 15th, no information was sent to Ladysmith, so that White remained inactive. As things turned out his inactivity can have made no difference to the result. From the information sent him by White, Buller concluded that Ladysmith could give him no direct help until he himself had got as far as Onderbroek Mountain or Pieter's Station, a point which he was not likely to reach at the earliest before the 17th.* Still, Ladysmith and Colenso were so near for mobile horsemen like the Boers, that Botha might very easily, if things had gone hard with the Boers in the morning, have telegraphed

* It is not impossible, however, that Buller was also influenced by a suspicion that the Boers could read his cipher, and deliberately wished to mislead them.

for reinforcements which might have arrived in time to turn the scale of battle in the afternoon, a move that a vigorous sortie from Ladysmith might have prevented.

Dec. 15, 5.30 A.M. The opening of the battle.

Cloudless and windless broke the morning of the 15th, the presage of a burning, fiery day to follow. Before dawn the British columns were in motion, and the sun rose upon them winding silently across the plain. From where they marched no sign of life could be seen across the dip that marked the river bed. But a watcher close by would have observed groups of uncouth, resolute men moving about by the trenches where they had been passing the night, making a hasty breakfast of Boer rusks and coffee, and eagerly discussing the long-expected attack—now at last a certainty. The deep peace of that beautiful still morning was not long to rest unbroken. At 5.30 the heavy naval battery rumbling along the Colenso road to the west of the railway came into action at a range of 5000 yards from the Colenso kopjes, and began to shell Fort Wylie. Under this bombardment the hillock soon looked like an active volcano from which the red clouds of dust, the green fumes of lyddite, and the grey smoke of common shell floated up in a great column some hundreds of feet straight into the still air. No guns opened in reply; not a sign showed whether the pall of smoke covered torn and mangled bodies or a bare, untenanted hump of earth and rocks.

Long recklessly rushes forward his guns within 1200 yards of Boer position. 6 A.M.

At 6 A.M. occurred a new and unexpected development of the artillery attack. Colonel Long, commanding the artillery, that morning accompanied the two batteries (14th and 66th) of the 1st Brigade Division and the six naval guns which had been detailed to cover Hildyard's attack on the centre. His orders were to move under cover of Barton's brigade, and a note from Sir R. Buller had warned him that he would probably at first have to rely on his naval guns alone as he could not with safety get the field guns into action. But Long was a convinced believer in a theory which had for some time been growing up among some artillerists in favour of pushing guns right forward and securing an overwhelming short-range fire. Practised within limits that theory had been justified both at Modder River and Magersfontein, where

the guns had pushed up to within 1200 yards of the Boer trenches.* Possibly, too, a certain ambiguity in Buller's note may, instead of deterring, have piqued Long into attempting to put his theory in practice against the Boers. Whatever the cause, whilst still about three miles from the river on the east side of the railway, Long gave the order to advance. Clattering past their infantry escort of Barton's brigade the batteries trotted across the plain towards Colenso. They were preceded at a distance of a quarter of a mile by the battery ground scouts. Between these and the guns rode a small group of officers consisting of Long and his staff officer, Captain Herbert, Colonel Hunt, commanding the brigade division, and Lieutenant Ogilvy, R.N., commanding the naval 12-pounders. Without stopping to take up a first position at medium range, and paying no heed to repeated messages from Barton asking him to wait for his escort, Long rode recklessly on till he was nearly abreast of the village of Colenso, and within about 700 yards of the river, before he gave the order to come into action. The mounted scouts had by this time reached the belt of scrub concealing the bank and had not seen a sign of the enemy. The batteries were 200 yards behind. Scarcely had Long given the order when a single gun was fired from the Colenso kopjes. This was the signal for which the Boers had patiently waited, and before the echo had died away a rattle of musketry burst from the silent trenches. Long and his guns, a mile and more in front of the infantry, were the only objects within range, and on them a terrific fire was concentrated. The batteries at once galloped up, bumped across a small ditch in their way, unlimbered, and got the teams away to a big donga 400 yards in rear—almost without loss, for the enemy's fire was at first erratic. The naval 12-pounders, which, being drawn by oxen, travelled slower than the field guns, were at that moment in the act of crossing the deep donga. Two guns under Lieu-

* In these cases, however, only after taking up preliminary positions and with infantry support. It is interesting to note that as early as 1889 the Drill Book fixed 1700 yards as the limit beyond which artillery, unless itself supported by infantry, could not approach unbroken infantry without extreme risk.

tenant James, which were already through, quickly came into action against Fort Wylie. The native drivers of the last four guns bolted the moment the Boers opened fire, but Lieutenant Deas, who was behind, managed to unlimber his guns some little way in the rear of the donga, while the two which were stuck in the donga were eventually got out by Ogilvy and opened fire from close behind it. These six guns were thus considerably scattered, and their commanders had moreover taken what advantage they could of the slightly rolling ground to get cover.

After fighting the Boer position alone for nearly an hour, gunners retire from guns.

The field batteries were in a perilous plight. After shooting wildly for the first minute or two the enemy began to pour in a most deadly fire, for they could scarcely have wanted a better target than was presented by the line of twelve guns drawn up with parade-like regularity in the open. The guns, on the other hand, were in a slight hollow and in a far worse position to reply than if they had been 1000 yards further back. Under a terrific volume of fire officers and men began to fall. The men did not suffer so much, but in the first few minutes Colonel Hunt and three other officers were wounded, and Captain Schreiber and Captain Goldie killed. But the way the guns were fought that day was a splendid example of skill and discipline. Concentrating, at 1250 yards * range, on Fort Wylie, from which most of the fire came, they kept up so steady a hail of shrapnel, and made such good practice, that after about fifteen minutes they actually succeeded in considerably beating down the enemy's fire, though not less than 1000 rifles, and perhaps double that number, were directed upon them. But though the rifle-fire was now less deadly, the shell-fire was increasing in intensity and accuracy. At 6.30 Long was desperately wounded through the body by a shrapnel bullet. They carried him back to the little ditch just behind the guns, already filling with wounded, but he refused to let any one attend him till all his men had been

* There is no reason to believe that there were any Boers nearer than this. There were none on the right bank nearer than Hlangwane, while those intrenched on the left bank could not have seen the batteries owing to the dip in which they stood and to the scrub between.

seen to. By dint of rapid firing the batteries held their own for some while longer against Boer shell and rifle-fire combined, but by 7 A.M. they had expended nearly all their ammunition. Under the circumstances it was thought best to order the men to cease firing and fall back to the big donga till fresh ammunition could be brought up. The men retired slowly and in perfect order, carrying as many of the wounded as they could with them. Captain Herbert rode off to inform General Buller of what had taken place, and a little later to find the ammunition columns, which were about three miles in rear, and ask for some ammunition wagons to be sent forward immediately.

No infantry sent up in time to support guns.

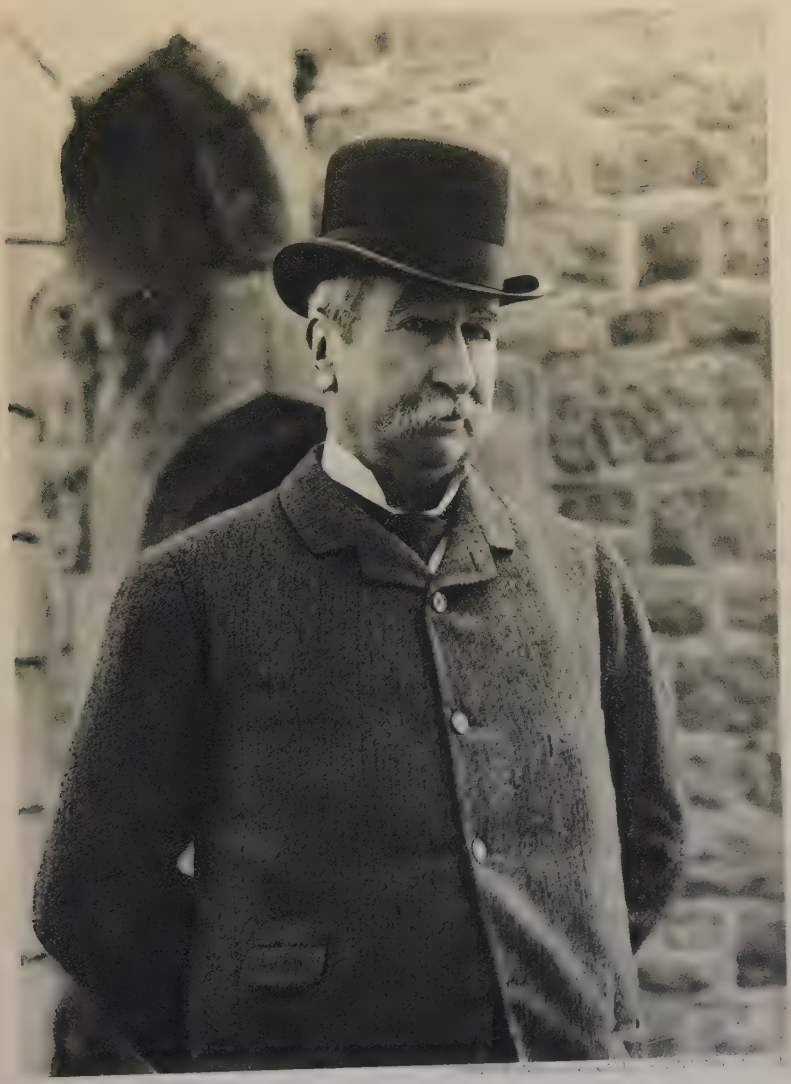
All this while the infantry—Barton's brigade on the right of the railway, and Hildyard's waiting near the big naval guns on the left—remained entirely inactive. However culpable Long's blunder, it was necessary to save him from its consequences at all hazards by an immediate advance of the infantry. If several battalions had been hurried forward at once they might not only have diverted the Boer fire and enabled some of the guns to be withdrawn to safer range, but would themselves have had the advantage of advancing under cover of a concentrated artillery fire; in fact the chances of the attack in the centre, such as they were, would not have been seriously compromised by Long's precipitancy. But beyond the gun escort, consisting of half the Irish and half the Scots Fusiliers, which had been outstripped and now rejoined the guns, taking up positions behind them to left and right, not a man moved forward to support. It was scarcely a matter in the discretion of the brigadiers. But Clery or Buller, by the naval guns, must have known the moment fire broke out that Long's batteries were engaged at close range with the Boer trenches, and ought either at once to have sent a galloper to order Long to withdraw his guns or to have accepted the situation and ordered Hildyard's and Barton's brigades to advance to the attack without delay.

Hart's advance on left. Misled by Kaffir guide.

Buller's attention was, it would seem, at that moment absorbed by the infantry attack on the left which was then just developing. The Irish Brigade, with the Dublin Fusiliers

Surprised in close formation. 6.30 A.M.

leading, the Inniskilling Fusiliers in second line, and the Connaught Rangers and Border Regiment in reserve, left camp at 4.30 and moved towards the bridle drift under the guidance of a native supplied by the Intelligence. They crossed the Doornkop Spruit with the leading battalion in "fours from the right of companies at deploying intervals," and the rest of the brigade in mass of quarter columns. A pontoon section of Engineers followed to make a bridge for the guns, if required, after the passage was forced. On the left of the infantry were Colonel Parsons's two batteries, and on the extreme left, guarding the flank, were the Royal Dragoons. From their position the latter could see the Boers all along the bank, and could look right into the trenches by E. Robinson's farm. Colonel Burn-Murdoch immediately and more than once reported to General Hart that the Boers were in strength all along his front and to his left. But Hart refused to pay any heed to these warnings. Nor would he alter the formation in which he was advancing his brigade, though it was one quite inexcusable in broad daylight and when almost in touch with the enemy. For if Long had been possessed of one theory, Hart was possessed of another, that open order was a fallacy and that the great thing was to keep men "well in hand," and to push right through regardless of losses. Towards 6.30 the head of Hart's brigade had got within 300 yards of the river, having for some reason or other branched off rather to the right of the track which led to the drift. At this juncture the Kaffir suddenly declared that the drift was not in front, but away to the right, at the very head almost of the great loop which receded into the Boer position. Whether he had been badly instructed by the Intelligence who sent him, whether he saw the Boers on the left and wished to avoid them, or whether he just thought that the white men being on foot would naturally wish to cross the river by ferry boat at the "pont drift," it is impossible to say. It was an awkward predicament for the general, and it does not speak well for the Intelligence that the Kaffir was sent without any one accustomed to dealing with natives. At the same time it seems clear that if Hart had studied either



General The Right Honourable Sir Redvers H. Buller, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

Commander-in-Chief S. Africa, Oct., 1899, to January, 1900.
Commanding Natal Field Force, January to September, 1900.

Photo by Preston, of Penzance.

the map or Sir R. Buller's plan with any care, or had reflected for a moment, he must have realised that he was certainly not meant to go into such an obvious death-trap as the loop, and that if there was no drift where he was, he ought to look for one higher up stream. That the track along which he had originally been marching presumably led to a drift apparently never occurred to him. There was no opportunity for further cross-questioning the guide. For suddenly, as the leading companies got within about 200 yards of the river, fire opened on them with the same unexpected crash with which it had opened on Long a quarter of an hour before, from trenches in front and flank, from the heavy gun on Red Hill, and from the field pieces on the plain. At the first shot the Kaffir bolted and was never seen again.

Gallant but useless advance of Hart's brigade into the loop.

The brigade was fairly caught in close order and lost no time in deploying in as loose order as possible, a movement which the brigadier, with characteristic vigour, at once set himself to restrain. When the Dublins reached the bank of the river no signs of a ford were to be seen, and in the pause that ensued the regiments became once more massed on the bank and men began falling fast. Colonel Cooper, commanding the Dublins, was just starting to lead his men up stream in search of the drift, when unfortunately Hart came up and ordered the brigade to the right into the big loop. Leaving the Border Regiment lining the river bank the three Irish regiments recrossed the Doornkop Spruit and pushed forward up the salient. The fire they now met was murderous. The rolling volleys of musketry took them full in the face and smote upon both flanks. There was scarcely a vestige of cover, the enemy were invisible, but the advance never faltered. Hart was conspicuous everywhere as he fearlessly rushed about urging his men forward. But he had committed a desperate mistake. He had no idea where he was taking his men beyond the recollection of the fact that the vanished Kaffir had pointed to the end of the loop. The leading companies were given no definite point to march on. The inevitable result followed. With a definite goal to make for, such as is furnished by a line of visible intrenchments, the soldier knows that his safety as well as his glory lies in reaching it.

Here it was different. Not only was there no visible point to aim at, but very soon the men were beset by a fatal uncertainty even as to the direction they were meant to move in. With their flanks becoming more enveloped and the fire in front more deadly at every step, that pitch of endurance beyond which men will not go without some very strong motive power to carry them forward was reached. The crowding of the men and confusion of units, due to Hart's refusal to allow a wide extension and to the continual sending up of reinforcements into the firing-line to keep up the advance, only made matters worse. Very soon the splendid dash with which the advance had begun died away. A little later the advance ceased altogether and the men remained lying under such scanty cover as they could find. Several gallant individual attempts to reach the river were made, and a small party reached a Kaffir kraal 300–400 yards from the end of the loop, while others on the right got into some low scrub near the bank, and made their way down to the river, though without finding any trace of a drift.

7.15 A.M. Buller orders Hart to retire covered by Lyttelton.

At this point General Buller, who had watched the attack from the higher ground in rear, saw that it was hopeless to persevere with it. Riding down to the salient himself he ordered Hart to retire. It was then a few minutes after seven. The attack had lasted barely forty minutes, and in that short time had already cost over 400 casualties. Lyttelton, whom Buller had ordered to cover the retirement, moved out with the Rifle Brigade and Durham Light Infantry to the mouth of the big loop, where he drew up his men across the Doornkop and along the bank of a small spruit and let the Irish retire through him. It was with the greatest difficulty at first that the brave Irish could be induced by their officers to obey the unwelcome order. At last they came back, exhausted and parched with thirst, but otherwise seemingly indifferent to the terrific fire with which the enemy followed up their retirement. Arrived at the spruit they threw themselves into it, and could not be induced to move on until they had slaked their thirst and cooled their bodies. Then they passed on as cool and indifferent as ever. Bringing up the rear came the gallant Cooper with the last

company of his faithful Dublins. The whole business was over in an hour and a half.

Artillery in action on left.

Meanwhile Parsons, who had been placed at Hart's disposal but never received a single order from him, had brought his guns into action on the left, behind the place where the brigade first reached the river, and all through Hart's attack and retirement did his utmost to cover him. Against a position so vast and so carefully masked, however, the fire of twelve guns was of little avail. In fact the batteries came in for some rough handling from the enemy's guns of position by which they had a gun put out of action and against which they could make no reply.

Dundonald's attack on Hlangwane. 7.15–9 A.M.

Turning awhile from Hart's decimated battalions reforming out of range on the left, and from Long's guns standing silent and deserted on the plain in front of Colenso, we may direct our attention to the right, where Dundonald was entrusted with the task of covering the flank and of occupying Hlangwane so as to enable the 7th Battery to enfilade the Colenso kopjes. For the former purpose Dundonald detailed the 13th Hussars, reserving his brigade of irregulars for the occupation of Hlangwane. This brigade, from which Bethune's Mounted Infantry had already been withdrawn for baggage guard and other duties, numbered about 800 troopers, in other words, a fighting strength when dismounted of barely 600 rifles. The size of the force indicates both the character of the resistance expected on that wing, and the slight importance attached by Sir R. Buller to the occupation of Hlangwane. At 7.15 the brigade dismounted in the bushy bed of the Gomba Spruit, rather more than a mile south of Hlangwane, and advanced on the hill in attack formation. The South African Light Horse were on the left, the Composite Regiment * was in the centre, and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry on the right. The first part of the advance was across bare mealie fields, and the heavy fire which was at once poured into the loose line of the irregulars showed that they had before them a much stronger force of the enemy than they had been led to

* Formed of the various miscellaneous mounted units originally at Estcourt.

expect. Pushing on rapidly they reached the foot of the hill where the loose rocks and scrubby bushes scattered over its slopes gave somewhat better cover. But the cover was equally good for the Boers, and they kept up so hot a fire that the further advance was very slow. Thorneycroft's were sent up the valley on the east of Hlangwane to try and work round that flank of the hill. But they found themselves in turn outflanked by a party of Boers who had anticipated this move and had taken up a position on the far side of the valley, and could not continue their advance. On the left Colonel Byng with the South African Light Horse, who went through their baptism of fire that day with all the gallantry of veteran soldiers, pushed doggedly forward and got a considerable way up the side of the hill. The Composites in the centre had less cover than either of the others and could only hold their ground and keep up a heavy fire on the crest.

Dundonald asks Barton for support but is refused.

Considering that the attacking force was barely two-thirds the strength of the Boers on the hill, and that for artillery support it could only get the partial attention of one battery which was mainly devoting itself to enfilading the Colenso kopjes, the attack had so far been distinctly successful. But it was now likely to fail for want of men. Dundonald rode off to ask Barton, whose support he could claim in accordance with the orders for the day, for a battalion of infantry to help carrying the hill. But Barton had meanwhile received orders not to commit his brigade, and refused to do anything, even to send two companies. And so the mounted brigade were left to hang on to the slopes of Hlangwane, and the one chance of success which offered itself that day was thrown away. Barton's refusal was no doubt covered by the letter of his orders, and it may be urged in his justification that Buller had already decided to abandon the conflict as soon as he could get away Long's guns, and that Barton could hardly be expected to realise the importance of Hlangwane better than Buller himself. Still, apart from a clear realisation of its value, it should have been obvious that the occupation of Hlangwane would have very effectively secured Buller's object, *viz.*, the protection

of Hildyard's flank and the withdrawal of the guns; and it is difficult not to ascribe Barton's refusal mainly to that deplorable fear of taking responsibility, which was one of the worst features of our Army system.

Buller, hearing that Long's guns are out of action, decides to abandon the attack after getting away the guns.

From this narrative of events on the right we must go back two or three hours to pick up the main thread of the battle. When Sir R. Buller rode down to the loop to recall Hart's brigade, he at once abandoned all thought of making another attempt to force a passage on the left, and decided to concentrate all his strength on the main attack. He accordingly rode back to superintend the advance of Hildyard's brigade, whose two leading battalions, the Queen's and Devons, had just begun to move down on the left of the railway in attack formation. Before he reached his station by the naval battery, Captain Herbert galloped up to him with the news that Long's guns were out of action. Coming immediately after Hart's failure, this was a heavy blow, one that it required all the iron nerve and quick judgment of a great general to meet and overcome. Could the attack still be pushed through under cover of all the other guns available sufficiently to enable Long's guns to get into action again, and by their fire decide the issue? Or was it wiser generalship to give up all thought of crossing the Tugela that day, and withdraw the guns with as little delay and loss as possible? General Buller, already disheartened, and influenced, perhaps, by the impression that Ogilvy's guns were out of action too, decided against the bolder course. He ordered Hildyard not to proceed with the attack, but to send one of his leading battalions across the railway to support the guns, and to advance with the other towards Colenso village, but without becoming too hotly engaged. He himself, accompanied by General Clery and the rest of his staff, rode down to the donga behind the guns to see what could be done, the little group of horsemen freely attracting the enemy's shells as it threaded its way through the lines of the advancing infantry.

Skilful advance of Hildyard's brigade into Colenso. 8–10.30 A.M.

Hildyard's brigade, which had been halted pending the last change of instructions, now resumed its advance, the Queen's and Devons in front and the East Surreys and West

Yorks in support. Skilfully adapting his formation both to the conditions of modern warfare and to the narrow front, barely 400 yards, available between the railway and the Tugela, Hildyard sent forward his battalions in line after line widely extended on a front of only two half companies.* As soon as they saw this advance the enemy gathered from their right flank, now no longer menaced, to resist what they believed to be the prelude to the main attack. Hart's repulse and the silencing of Long's guns had been followed by a lull in the battle, but as soon as Hildyard's leading companies came within range the storm burst again. Moving forward steadily the Queen's reached a shelter trench, dug by the Durban Light Infantry two months before, about level with Ogilvy's guns, and some 400 yards from the village. Here they paused while the Devons advanced obliquely through them, crossed the railway, pushed forward under a fairly heavy fire to the deserted guns, and then worked past them across the open almost into the scrub by the river bank. Seeing their old friends the Devons right ahead the Queen's would not be denied, and Colonel E. O. Hamilton ordered his leading half battalion under Major Burrell to occupy Colenso. The men were out on to the deadly slope at once, and as they crossed the lip of the trench the storm of bullets burst on them with redoubled fury. In vain Ogilvy's and Jones's crews slaved at their guns to stem the terrific tide of fire. But it was not for nothing that Hildyard had spent the last two years training his brigade at Aldershot. In loosest order and taking every advantage of the scanty cover that offered itself, but still in perfect cohesion, the Queen's went swiftly and steadily forward. With remarkably few casualties they got to the village, where they were joined by some of the Devons who had recrossed the line, and by some of the Irish Fusiliers escorting the guns. Some of the Queen's tried to push on to the river, a few men actually getting on to the road bridge. The rest occupied the houses and sheds in the village and

* Columns of half-companies, at from fifty to eighty paces distance, men in single rank at six to eight paces interval. Reserve companies about eight hundred yards in rear of supports.

from windows and over walls kept up a hot fire on the trenches. So effective was this fire that they drove the Boers from their trenches on the opposite bank to take refuge in the higher ones behind. At the naval battery nearly three miles in rear the gunners had lost sight of the advance from the moment when the Queen's went charging down the slope into the village. Watching anxiously, the next thing they saw was a swarm of little brown figures scrambling desperately up the kopjes. In a moment every muzzle was turned upon them. But before the order to fire could be given somebody shouted, "They're our men!" The gunners cheered but they lost the only chance the enemy gave them that day. The Queen's and Devons now stayed in the positions they had won, and at 10.30 A.M. Major Burrell received General Buller's order to retire from Colenso as soon as the guns were withdrawn.

Gallant attempts to get away the guns. 9–10.30 A.M.

Meanwhile, during Hildyard's advance the most dramatic incidents of the day were taking place in close proximity. When Buller got down to the donga and saw the deserted guns his only thought was to get them away at once. The ammunition wagons asked for by Herbert were already on their way down. But Buller ordered them back again, not thinking it any use, apparently, to try to get the guns into action again in order to cover their own withdrawal. He now told his A.D.C., Captain Schofield, R.H.A., to try and bring some of the guns out. Schofield called for volunteers, and Corporal Nurse and two limber teams, all of the 66th Battery, offered themselves. Then Captain Congreve, Rifle Brigade and Headquarters Staff, and Lieutenant the Hon. F. S. Roberts, 60th Rifles, A.D.C. to General Clery, volunteered also in order to assist in limbering up. Schofield started from the big donga and reached the guns with the two teams untouched, but fifty yards from the little ditch behind the guns Roberts fell from his horse mortally wounded in the body. At the edge of the ditch Congreve, who had already been hit repeatedly through the clothes, was hit in the leg by a bullet which killed his horse. Meanwhile Schofield and Nurse had limbered up two guns of the 66th Battery and returned safely, without having a man or horse touched, to the big

donga. Roberts was lying helpless in the open under a heavy fire, and as soon as Congreve saw it he started to crawl out, wounded as he was, to bring him in. He was joined by Major Babtie, R.A.M.C., who, under a heavy fire, had remained tending the wounded in the little donga for the last two hours, and between them they carried Roberts into comparative shelter. A little later, in response to a message for assistance sent over to the 7th Battery on the right, Captain Reed took three wagon teams and rode with them straight across the plain. He had much further than Schofield to go, and was in view of the enemy the whole way. Before he reached the guns he had lost 13 horses out of 22, and 7 men out of 13, being himself wounded in the leg, and the attempt had to be abandoned.* All this while Buller stayed at the big donga under a heavy fire, to which he paid not the slightest attention. His staff surgeon, Captain Hughes, was killed beside him, and he himself was struck in the side and severely bruised by a partially spent fragment of shell, though he never let it be known at the time that he was hit.

Advisability of covering the guns till nightfall.

It was evident that the fire directed on the guns was still too heavy to enable them to be withdrawn, and that it would be necessary to make a much stronger demonstration against Fort Wylie than that made by the handful of Queen's and Devons before another attempt could be made. Buller still had eight practically untouched battalions in hand, not counting the two battalions of Lyttelton's on the left, and three field batteries, besides the naval guns. He therefore had plenty of material for concentrating a really powerful fire on the Boer trenches, and giving all the impression of an intended attack in force. But such a demonstration might have meant several hundred casualties, and it would have been a perfectly reasonable alternative to have withdrawn the greater part of the force out of rifle-range, and to have

* Captains Congreve and Reed, Lieutenant Roberts, Corporal Nurse, and Major Babtie received the Victoria Cross. Captain Schofield received it eventually, though Sir R. Buller at first refused to recommend him on the ground that he had been told to make the attempt. Eighteen non-commissioned officers and artillery drivers also received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

disposed the guns and intrenched the infantry in positions which would command all the approaches to the deserted batteries. Across that open ground no force of Boers would ever have dreamt of carrying out a counter-attack. Arrangements could have been made to bring up food and water—the latter an important want unprovided for in the preparations for the battle—and at dusk the guns could have been removed without greater danger than that created by snipers from the bushes or from Colenso village. If that had been done Colenso would have gone down to history as a repulse, indeed, but not more discreditable to the British Army than Magersfontein or many another hard-fought fight in which British troops have been worsted by the force of circumstances or the mistakes of their generals.

11 A.M. Buller decides to abandon the guns altogether

But the real disaster of Colenso was now at hand. The amazing confidence with which Buller had made his plan for the battle had been giving way to a steadily growing disheartenment, as that plan was checked at one point after another. And now the awful sights of the battlefield, the emotion of being compelled passively to watch those splendid attempts to rescue the guns, which we may well believe a man of Buller's personal courage would sooner have taken part in himself than have had to ask of his men, the shock of his wound, and the prostrating effect of long hours in the saddle under the glowing African sun, added to all the mental anxieties and disappointments of the day, completely broke his spirit. Utterly losing heart, indifferent to all consequences, and intent only on making an end of a miserable business, he decided to abandon the guns to the enemy and get back to camp. At 11 A.M. he sent word to Hildyard to tell the Queen's and Devons to retire at once without waiting for the removal of the guns. Then, after ordering Ogilvy's naval guns to be withdrawn from the big donga, he rode off to the east to recall Dundonald.

His action inexcusable.

To know when to acknowledge defeat and to refuse to make needless sacrifices to prestige is sometimes part of wise generalship. But there can be no such justification for the abandonment of the guns at Colenso. It is not as if the guns had been captured by the enemy and could only have

been re-captured at a cost of life far exceeding their value. They were still in the British firing-line, half a mile away from the river, which the Boers would have to cross to come near them. If they had been covered it is doubtful if the enemy would even have attempted to interfere with their removal at nightfall. But even supposing that the retention of the guns had doubled the casualties of the day, that loss should have been faced—not for the sake of mere prestige, but because at that moment guns were far more important than men. They were nearly half of Buller's field artillery; without them there could be no question of relieving Ladysmith. Weeks would elapse before new guns could reach Natal from England, and during those weeks the fate of Ladysmith, perhaps of the whole war, might be decided. But it is idle to suppose that Buller at that moment was capable of balancing loss and gain, when he could not even think of rendering the guns useless to the enemy by dismantling the breech blocks—a far less dangerous and conspicuous undertaking than bringing up a limber team.*

General retirement. 11.30 A.M.–2.30 P.M.

The general retirement now began. Ogilvy's guns, whose ox teams had suffered heavily, were with some difficulty got away with the assistance of the limber teams of the abandoned batteries. A number of ammunition wagons were, however, left behind at the big donga. Dundonald's brigade had the greatest difficulty in disentangling themselves from their position, and though covered by the 7th Battery and afterwards supported by the Royal Fusiliers sent forward by Barton, took nearly three hours to get away, and suffered as many losses as in the attack. The Queen's in Colenso received the order to retire before 11.30 A.M., but it did not reach the Devons till an hour later, and apparently never reached Colonel Bullock, commanding the Devons, who with two sections of his men occupied a crack in the ground a little way in front of the guns, or some of the companies of Irish and Scots Fusiliers who were also right in front east of the railway. The rest

* Volunteers for this task could have crawled round under cover of ditches almost all the way to the guns. It might have been possible, too, after removing the wounded—or even without doing so—for a general free from the ordinary sentiment about endangering the lives of wounded men to have let the naval guns shell the deserted batteries at close range.

retired as skilfully as they had advanced, under an equally heavy fire, their retirement being well covered on both sides of the railway by the East Surreys, who in their turn fell back under cover of Parsons's guns. By 2.30 P.M. everything was over, and the last troops to leave the field, the heavy naval battery with its escort of two of Lyttelton's battalions, and Bethune's Mounted Infantry seeing in the stragglers, were following the weary columns back into the previous day's camp, where the men, jaded, weary, and annoyed, but unconscious of defeat, were already pitching the tents which a few hours before they had struck in the confident belief that they would not need them till Ladysmith was relieved.

Scattered parties made prisoners.

The difficulty of communicating an order to retire over the scattered area of a modern battle was again illustrated at Colenso. The case of the sections of Devons and Irish and Scots Fusiliers has already been mentioned. On the left some rather curious incidents occurred. A few men under Colonel Thackeray of the Inniskillings had got into some scrub close by the river on the right of the loop, and remained there till 5 o'clock, in ignorance of Hart's retreat. At that hour a Boer commandant who had crossed the river with a few men came up and claimed the group as his prisoners. An animated argument ensued between Thackeray and the Boer, with the result that the Colonel and his men were allowed to return to camp. A similar incident happened to half a company of the Borders under Lieutenant Warren, still further to the left. Other scattered details were taken prisoners. A considerable number of unwounded artillerymen remained behind in the little donga by the deserted guns without attempting to escape, presumably unaware of the general retirement.

The Boers made no attempt to interfere with the retirement, and only crossed the river several hours later, towards 5 P.M., when everything was clear, to pick up stragglers and take away the abandoned guns. Crossing the road bridge with a few wagon teams, a number of Vryheid and Krugersdorp burghers and Johannesburg Police, under Field-Cornet Emmett, Botha's brother-in-law, went to fetch the guns.

They were suddenly met by a hot fire from Bullock's men in the little crack of ground before the guns, and a regular fight ensued, till Emmett, getting hold of a British ambulance orderly looking for wounded, went up under cover of the red cross to ask Bullock to surrender. Bullock ordered him back, and declared he would fight it out. But meanwhile the Boers had come round behind, and the soldiers, perishing of thirst, began surrendering freely. Finally, one of the Boers behind, seeing Bullock make a movement as if he would draw his revolver, stunned him with a blow from the butt end of his rifle. The rest then gave in. The Boers then took the ten "great, splendid cannons," more than all the artillery they had at Colenso, with their limbers and ten ammunition wagons with about 600 rounds of shell, limbered up, and drove unmolested and at their leisure back to the bridge and across the river. Thus ended the battle of Colenso.

Dec. 16–17. Armistice. British retire to Chieveley and Frere.

On the following morning Sir R. Buller asked for an armistice in order to collect the rest of the dead and wounded. Botha consented to an armistice till midnight. In view of the possibility of the Boers shelling the camps, orders were given that they were to be withdrawn as soon as the armistice expired. This order was carried out, though the movement was somewhat retarded by a total eclipse of the moon, and before morning the army was in its new positions. Hildyard's and Barton's brigades and the irregular cavalry remained at Chieveley under command of General Clery, and Lyttelton's and Hart's brigades, under the command of Lyttelton, with the regular cavalry returned to Frere, where General Buller took up his headquarters.

The casualties. Work of the field hospitals.

The British casualties at Colenso included 7 officers and 138 men killed, 43 officers and 719 men wounded, 21 officers and 199 men missing and prisoners, a total of 1127. Out of this number 523 had occurred in Hart's brigade in the space of an hour and a half, the Dublin Fusiliers alone sustaining 216, five more than the Seaforths at Magersfontein. Hildyard's brigade, more skilfully handled, only lost 235, of whom 4 officers and 47 men were made prisoners. The 14th and 66th Batteries had 2 officers and 7 men killed, 6 officers and

Battle of
COLENSO
DEC. 15. 1899
DIRECTIONS
British Infantry
British Cavalry & Mounted Infantry
Boers.
Artillery.
Camps
Onderbrook Spruit
Langverwacht Spruit
Onderbrook Spruit
Gomba Spruit
Bushy Country
Rough Bushy Country
Open Rolling Veld
Duornkop Sp.
Blaauwkrantz River
RED HILL 3600
HLANGWANE
FORT WYLIE
COLENSO
Kraal
Pont drift
Bridle drift
Bridlift
Wagon drift
Parsons' Bde Div 6.30 a.m.
Naval Guns 5.30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Lyttelton 5.30 a.m.
SHOOTER'S HILL
Platelayer's Hut
Headquarters
GUN HILL
Barton
Mounted Bde (Dundonald) 7.15 a.m.
HUSSAR HILL
BLOY'S FARM
BAUMAN'S FARM
PIETER'S HILL
AASVOGEL KOP
RAILWAY HILL
HART'S HILL
MONTE CRISTO
Boer bridge of Ry. material
Boer Cable with cradle
Small falls drift
Iron road bridge 3110
Hildyard 10.12 a.m.
Labuschagne's Kraal
Furlongs 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 Scale
From Chievely 2 m.
From Estcourt 14 m.
To Weenen 13½ m.
To Ladysmith 9½ m.
Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London.

20 men wounded, and 5 officers and 44 men missing.* The average of killed to wounded was very low, less than one in five, and many of the wounded were able to walk the two or three miles back to the hospitals unassisted. The ambulances were out all day on the 15th, and often under fire, assisted by a specially raised corps of civilian stretcher-bearers, and by a small body of Indian stretcher-bearers raised as a testimony of their loyalty by the Indian community of Natal. Four brigade field hospitals took up their position under cover of a slight rise, while a general hospital was pitched at Chieveley. The wounded began to be brought in at 8.30 A.M. From about 2 P.M. onwards the less serious cases were removed by train to hospitals at Estcourt and Maritzburg. The work of the doctors, continued all through the night and till 4 P.M. the following afternoon, with only two hours rest, was beyond praise. Lieutenant Roberts was brought into the 4th Brigade Field Hospital on the evening of the 15th, wounded in three places. He was transferred to Chieveley early on the 16th, and died there that night. The Boer casualties were insignificant, perhaps 40 all told. None of the British guns except Long's seem to have located their trenches to any effect, while, except on Hlangwane, the Boers were never really attacked by the infantry at all.

* The following were the casualties among officers:—Staff: mortally wounded, Lieutenant Hon. F. Roberts; wounded, Captains Congreve and Hon. St. L. Jervis. Royal Field Artillery: killed, Captain Goldie and Lieutenant Schreiber; wounded, Colonels Long and Hunt, Captains White Thomson, Reed, Elton, and Lieutenant Goodson. 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers: killed, Captains Loftus and Charley; wounded, Captains Hancocks, Hessey, Buckley, Lieutenants Leverson, Whiffin, Best, Weldon, and Devenish. 2nd Devonshire Regiment: wounded, Captains Goodwyn, Radcliffe, Vigors, Lieutenants Gardiner and Storey. Rifle Brigade: wounded, Lieutenant Graham. 1st Border Regiment: wounded, Major Heygate, Captain Probyn, Lieutenant Marsh. 1st Connaught Rangers: wounded, Colonel Brooke and Lieutenant Brooke. 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers: wounded, Captain Brush. 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers: killed, Captain Bacon, Lieutenant Henry; wounded, Major Gordon, Captain Shewan, Lieutenant M'Leod. 2nd Queen's: wounded, Lieutenants Tufnell and Vesey. Thorneycroft's M.I.: killed, Lieutenant Jenkins; wounded, Lieutenants Otto, Ponsonby, and Holford. Natal Carabiniers: wounded, Lieutenants Mackay and Wilson. South African Light Horse: wounded, Lieutenants Banhurst and Cook. Royal Army Medical Corps: killed, Captain Hughes; wounded, Major Brannigan.

No attack was ever made at Colenso.

This last fact, indeed, is the most striking feature of that extraordinary action, the key to its real military significance. The battle of Colenso was not an unsuccessful attack on the Boer position behind the Tugela, for the sufficient reason that no attack was ever made. The main Boer defence, the deep and broad Tugela, was never even essayed. Only scattered parties of soldiers here and there reached its banks, there never was any organised attempt to force a passage. The Boers were not pressed, they suffered no losses worth mentioning, they never even found it necessary to move their few and scattered guns. Before any attack could begin the blunders of two subordinate officers had caused considerable losses to one of the infantry brigades, and had put two batteries out of action. The attack was immediately abandoned. A few hours later, after a half-hearted and inadequate effort to cover the removal of the batteries, the general abandoned these also and retired. That was all.

Criticism of the battle. Buller's failure.

Colenso was a striking demonstration of the power of modern weapons to punish those who refused to recognise or pay heed to the new conditions of war. First and foremost of these was General Buller himself. His plan of attack would have been difficult to justify at any time—against the modern rifle it was bound to fail. For even had his subordinates made no mistakes, even had Buller been as iron-willed and as prodigal of the lives of his men as Napoleon himself, it is hard to believe that the frontal attack on such a position could ever have succeeded. And, perhaps, the very mistakes that prevented the attack thus proved blessings in disguise. Had Long not prematurely unmasked the Boer trenches, had the Boers felt sufficient confidence in themselves to allow the heads of the attacking brigades to cross the river before opening fire, Colenso might well have gone down to history as a sheer massacre. The execution of the plan was on a level with its conception. Long's reckless advance and Hart's frantic dash into the deadly loop only exemplified the same spirit, the same lack of information, the same disregard of the enemy and contempt of his powers, as the intended frontal attack itself. In a sense Buller certainly had bad luck, but it was the bad luck

that almost inevitably attends faulty plans and inadequate preparations. Nothing was done to retrieve that ill luck. No support reached Long while he was still in action, no covering movement was made sufficient to allow the guns to get into action again or to be withdrawn. The one chance of success that offered itself during the day, the capture of Hlangwane, was rejected, partly because Barton lacked initiative, partly because Buller had already given up all hope of achieving anything. Bad in its conception, and worse in its execution, Colenso was worst of all in its abandonment. For that there can be no excuse. It cannot be said that the men were beaten and that immediate withdrawal averted worse consequences. Barely half the force had been under fire at all. The battalions that had been engaged had been under very heavy fire, which they had faced with admirable courage, but the physical strain they had undergone—hardly comparable with the strain Methuen's troops endured at Modder River or Magersfontein—cannot have exhausted them completely. Buller's men had not failed him, nor would they have failed him then whatever he had asked of them. But it was the general who, at the critical moment, failed his troops. Already before the battle his purpose and his spirits seem to have wavered more than once, and under the stress of temporary failure his judgment and nerve alike forsook him.

Abandoning all hope of relieving Ladysmith, Buller suggests its surrender to White.

But the worst was yet to follow. Just as in the crisis of the battle he had failed the men whom he led, so now in the hour of trial he was to fail his country which had entrusted the fortune of the war into his hands. Fortunately for England she still had men in the field and in the council chamber who preserved her from the consequences of that failure. It is in justice to them that it is necessary to tell the painful story which one might otherwise well have wished to pass over in silence. Serious and humiliating as was the check at Colenso, it was no irretrievable disaster. But such it seemed to Sir R. Buller when he returned to Chieveley and reflected on the position in which his easy acceptance of defeat had left him. He now realised, what he had forgotten when he abandoned the guns, that he could not relieve

Ladysmith without them. Once again he utterly lost heart. Not only did he despair of doing anything himself, but he despaired for others. With a confused recollection of certain messages from Ladysmith in which Sir G. White had urged the desirability of speedy relief, and completely forgetful of all the examples furnished by the endurance of beleaguered garrisons at all periods of history, he abandoned himself to the conclusion that Ladysmith must fall before any attempt could be made to relieve it. On the morning of the 16th he telegraphed to Lord Lansdowne that the relief of Ladysmith was impossible, that Sir G. White would be compelled to lay down his arms, and that he proposed to intrench himself in a defensive position near Chieveley. Then, on that same morning, without waiting for a reply, without waiting to get the fullest information from Sir G. White as to the resources at his disposal, without consulting his senior officers, he sent a heliographic message to White suggesting the surrrender of Ladysmith. The exact wording of that message has not yet been officially disclosed,* but its general purport has long been a matter of common knowledge. It was a suggestion or recommendation to Sir G. White to make what terms he could with the Boers. The only provisos were that he should not surrender without taking the precaution first to

* The following version may be taken as representing the purport, though not necessarily the exact wording, of the leading clauses of this message: "As it appears certain that I cannot relieve Ladysmith for another month, and even then only by means of protracted siege operations . . . you will burn your ciphers, destroy your guns, fire away your ammunition, and make the best terms possible with the general of the besieging forces, after giving me time to fortify myself on the Tugela." But it is only fair to suppose that the message, read as a whole and in connection with other messages sent on that same day, was somewhat less uncompromising, and suggested rather than ordered surrender. It is certainly to be regretted, from the historian's point of view, that it has not been possible to treat this question with such full and complete knowledge of the exact contents of all the official documents as may some day be furnished to the public. But it would be even more undesirable to dismiss the Colenso episode without any discussion of this all-important question so closely connected with it. In its main lines, at any rate, the story is perfectly clear. The essential facts could scarcely be said to be in dispute, even if Sir R. Buller had not made a public admission of them. And it is upon these facts and not upon the exact wording of a particular document that the criticisms in these pages are based.

destroy his ciphers, ammunition and military stores, and that he should not do so before giving the force at Chieveley time to intrench itself. It was not actually an order. But it was sufficiently strong to have been taken as such by any one who had already let the idea of surrender cross his mind, and it is almost impossible to regard it as a mere incidental discussion of the precautions that might have to be taken if the worst came to the worst. It certainly was not understood in that sense in Ladysmith, nor is it easy to make the request for time to intrench, read together with the message sent by Sir R. Buller to the Secretary of State that he would intrench at Chieveley, bear any other meaning than that the surrender referred to was immediate surrender.

Buller's own account of the message to White.

Nearly two years later, on October 10, 1901, in a speech which directly led to his dismissal from the command of the Aldershot Army Corps, Sir R. Buller referred to this message in the following curious passage:—

"They attack me, and they say that I wrote a telegram in which I ordered Sir George White to give up Ladysmith, to destroy his books, and so forth. I wrote a good many telegrams and I wrote one telegram that admits partially of that description. . . . I attacked Colenso on December 15. I was unsuccessful; it was a very trying day; I was thirty-six hours at work; I was fourteen hours in the saddle. It was the hottest day we had the whole of the time I was out there, and I had rank bad luck, and I hope to show some day that if I had not had bad luck I had good enough men with me to get in. I attacked Colenso and I failed; and, having failed, I had to consider the people in front of me in Ladysmith. . . . I knew that horse sickness was almost certain to become very prevalent in the Tugela Valley; I knew that enteric fever was endemic, and was likely to become epidemic in the Tugela Valley at that time. I believed also that the Boers were engaged in putting dead horses into the water which the garrison was obliged to drink. I knew that the garrison would have trouble, and great trouble, with their sick. I did not know what supplies there were. I thought at that time I had officially in writing that the garrison could not be fed beyond the end of the year. I was wrong, but at that time I thought it and believed it. The end of the year was fifteen days off. The message I had to send to Sir George White was that I had attacked, that I had

failed, that I could not possibly make another attempt for a month, and then I was certain I could not do it except by slow fighting, and not by rushing. That was the message I had to send, and I had to ask him certain questions. I wrote the telegram out, and I read it through several times, and I said, 'It is a mean thing to send a telegram like that to a fellow like that. He will sit still till the end. What about his sick?' I was in command of Natal, and it was my duty to give my subordinate some assistance, some lead, something that in the event of his determining to surrender he would be able to produce and say, 'Well, Sir Redvers Buller agreed.' I, therefore, spatchcocked into the middle of that telegram a sentence in which I suggested it would be necessary to surrender the garrison, what he should do when he surrendered, and how he should do it. I put it after one question he had to answer, and followed it with another question. I did not like to suggest to a man I believed to be a brave soldier that he should do this, that, or the other; but I put in the sentence in order that if he found he was obliged to surrender it would be some sort of cover for him. In fact, what I felt at the time was that if surrender came I should be just as responsible for it as he was, and I did not mean to stand up and say it was all his fault."

Discussion of Buller's action.

As regards the amazing assumption that it is a general's duty to make it easier for his subordinates to surrender by giving them a "lead" nothing need be said, except that to have given utterance to it was in itself more than sufficient reason for Sir R. Buller's immediate dismissal. As for the other reasons given, they were mere surmises of what might take place. Not one of them was correct, as a matter of fact, and not all of them together, if they had been correct, would have justified the suggestion of surrender. But the whole passage throws an interesting light on Sir R. Buller's state of mind after Colenso. The fact is that he had acquiesced in the surrender of Ladysmith as inevitable, and one cannot help surmising that in his despair he may even have thought of it as the best solution. It must be remembered that, from Buller's point of view, White's failure to hold his own in the field and his submission to investment had been the cause of the break-up of the army corps and of its defeat all along the line. The attempts to relieve it might cost infinitely more in lives than Ladysmith was

worth. Might it not be better if White's 13,000 men were just "written off" as a bad debt, and the original defensive scheme for Natal reorganised on the line of the Tugela? Then it might still be possible for Buller to return to Cape Colony to carry out the original plan of campaign. To abandon the idea of relieving Ladysmith in order to push the campaign more vigorously elsewhere was in itself not an unreasonable scheme, though it is doubtful whether it would have been the best under the circumstances. But it was essential to its success that Ladysmith should hold out to the last breath, and should even then attempt to cut its way out rather than surrender. The surrender of Ladysmith at that moment would have had a terrible moral effect. Not only would it, in all probability, have meant a general rising in Cape Colony, but it might well have emboldened foreign powers to intervene. And in any case it would have released the whole of the Boer forces in Natal for active operations against Buller, who, on the utterly indefensible south bank of the Tugela, would soon have been invested himself or forced to retire towards Maritzburg and Durban. Every hour that Ladysmith held out, while reinforcements were coming from England, was precious to the Empire. But Buller, his imagination and reason alike numbed by despair, was ready that Ladysmith should surrender without more ado.

Spirited attitude of White and of Government. Lord Roberts appointed to the command.

To Sir G. White and his staff the message at first seemed hardly credible. The first idea that suggested itself was that the Boers had got hold of the British cipher. But repetition of the message silenced all doubts. Sir G. White replied that he had not the slightest intention of surrendering, but expressed the hope that Sir R. Buller would continue to keep some of the enemy engaged so that they should not all concentrate against Ladysmith. At the same time he issued a proclamation in Ladysmith that the defence would be continued, "in the same spirited manner as it has hitherto been conducted until the general officer commanding-in-chief in South Africa does relieve it." At home Buller's despairing message created the utmost consternation. Especially was this the case in the War Office, which, overwhelmed

by the successive tidings of disaster, seemed almost inclined to acquiesce in his conclusions. For once, the much-abused politicians showed themselves stronger men than the soldiers. Most of the Ministers had left town for Christmas. But Lord Lansdowne had stayed on at the War Office, and, fortunately, he had at his side, in Mr. Balfour, a colleague on whose firm support and courageous counsel he could rely at this critical moment. A message was immediately cabled to Sir R. Buller directing him to persevere, or, if unwilling to do so, to hand over the Natal command to one of his subordinates and to return home. Later in the day Lord Salisbury arrived, and at an informal meeting of such Ministers as were in town it was resolved, without waiting to consult Lord Wolseley or the War Office, to offer the supreme command in South Africa to Lord Roberts, with Lord Kitchener to accompany him as chief of the staff. It was a sudden decision, but the idea itself was not altogether a new one. Buller's previous hesitations and changes of mind, his sudden departure to Natal, where he first announced that he had only gone to inspect the situation, and then that he was going to take the field in person, and the evident lack of a controlling hand in Cape Colony, had already raised the question of the advisability of sending out another commander. The contradictory messages sent by Buller before Colenso increased the uneasiness of the Government, an uneasiness quickened to instant decision by the news of his defeat and the clear evidence of his demoralisation. Lord Roberts was telegraphed for, was brought to a meeting of Ministers at Lansdowne House at an early hour on Sunday the 17th and there told the object of his summons. After a few minutes' silent consideration he accepted, believing that in spite of his years the careful and vigorous life he had led would enable him to meet the heavy physical strain of a long campaign. The appointment was published by the War Office that same evening on the ground that the situation in Natal called for Sir R. Buller's undivided attention. At the same time it was announced that all the rest of the Army Reserve would be called up, the Seventh Division hurried forward, reinforcements

DIRECTIONS

British

Boers

The solid lines indicate positions taken up

The dotted lines movements of the forces.

MAP TO ILLUSTRATE

LORD METHUEN'S OPERATIONS

Nov. 20 - Dec. 12 1899.

of artillery sent, nine Militia battalions allowed to volunteer for foreign service, a force of Yeomanry volunteers and a contingent of infantry volunteers enrolled for South African service, that the patriotic offers received from the colonies would be accepted, "preference being given to offers of mounted contingents," and that further local mounted corps would be raised in South Africa.

Retrospect. Estimate of the Boer success.

With the "Black Week" of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso the first main period of the war comes to a close. For the Boers it was on the whole a period of success. It is true their success was not all that they had expected, nor all that it might have been. They had lost rare opportunities by delays in mobilisation, by faulty strategy, by the lack of the dash and readiness to sacrifice life necessary to successful attack, but for which they might have overrun all South Africa before Buller's army landed, or at least been in possession of the garrisons which at the end of this period they were still besieging. They were already standing on the defensive. Still they had achieved great things. They had defeated and corralled one large British force, they had invaded and annexed vast tracts of country, and now they had won three signal victories within one week on British soil. Well might the Boers declare on the day after Colenso that the God of their fathers had been with His chosen people as on that self-same day sixty-one years before when He had helped them to rout the Zulu hordes of Dingaan. Compared with these victories, Dingaan's Day and Majuba were alike insignificant, and to men who like old Paul Kruger could remember the whole history almost of British policy in South Africa—knowing nothing of the real spirit of England when once awakened — there could be little doubt but that England would soon surrender as she had surrendered before.

The British military failure.

As for the British the war had taken them unprepared. They started behindhand and they never made up what they had lost. The scheme on which all their calculations were framed was unstrategical in its character, largely determined by political considerations, and based on an unwarrantable underestimate of the enemy's fighting capacity. The key-

stone of the whole scheme was the assumption that Sir G. White could hold his own in Natal for an indefinite length of time. That assumption gave way at the very outset and the great army corps had to be broken up to stop the gap which the scheme had overlooked. Even for this task it proved insufficient. Each of the fragments proved incapable of fulfilling the task assigned to it. The fault lay not with the soldiers and regimental officers, who as a rule behaved magnificently. Nor did it lie altogether with the generals. They were indeed responsible for much, as the foregoing chapters have shown. But the lack of adequate preparation, of organised information, the terrible immobility of their forces hampered them at every turn. Had they been men of commanding ability they might have triumphed over even these obstacles. But then the system which in spite of all past experiences sent an infantry force to conquer the Boers, which had provided no maps of Natal south of Ladysmith, which made its plans without any reference to what the Boers might do, was not a system likely to produce men of commanding ability. It produced generals in its own likeness, and the strategy of those generals often bears a curious psychological resemblance to the general strategy of the plan of campaign. The real fault lay with the nation, a nation ready to spend money on its Army, but utterly indifferent to the conditions of military efficiency. And of that national indifference not only the first months of failure, but the long and costly struggle that followed, have been the fruit and the punishment.

British patriotism and steadfastness.

But if the nation had been indifferent to the need for military efficiency it was not indifferent to the demands of patriotism. Its reverses, instead of proving it soft and without spirit, as its enemies confidently hoped, only brought out its highest qualities, its sober judgment and its unwavering resolution. In that hour of trial it made no unworthy attempt to seek a scapegoat for its own omissions and negligences either in the Government or in the generals in the field. Convinced only the more firmly by defeat of the justice of its cause, it plainly showed its resolve to see the war through at any cost. And not in England alone, but in every part of the

British dominions did that resolve find utterance. Deep as was the gloom of that "Black Week," humiliating as was the sense of defeat and failure, one may wonder whether the thrill of a common sympathy and a common purpose throughout the whole length and breadth of the Empire may not have been worth more than many easily won victories.

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